SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 518. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 3RD, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

LET

no foreign power disguise from itself the consequences of forcing war upon this country. The men of Great Britain are, without doubt, the strongest and most determined on sea or land. In a just quarrel they are stern, invincible, and undivided. Their wealth and resources are incalculable. Their energy without bounds. Still, there are many individual exceptions in this great national bulk of fearless strength. Some are found who seem hopelessly out of the running; who go about their share of the world's work listlessly, in a half-hearted manner. To

THEM

the "wild joy of living" is an unknown sensation. If they eat or drink, or do anything out of the ordinary course, they are liable to the severest penalties of headache, nausea, indigestion, nervous tremors, and many other disagreeable reminders that they are but feeble folk. The real truth is, they are ***Never Well,*** and they generally despair of attaining to that degree of health which so largely contributes to make life worth living. It is to

ALL

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON

No. 518. ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending December 3rd, 1898.

Testing a Coward.

OVER two centuries ago. Fair Virginia, in her most rugged, uncouth state, yet rich in the dignity of an advanced settlement, the favourite ward of England's sovereigns.

The crude fort at Jamestown held a merry garrison, the Governor having impressed upon royalty across the sea the importance of troops in a land where unexpected rebellions against authority might succeed the partially triumphant uprising in 1676.

The commander of the garrison was Colonel Fortune. The number and quality of his troops are not important factors in this tale. Among the men were a dozen or more young subalterns, fresh from England, undergoing their first rough work in the forests of Virginia.

Near the fort were the homes of the officers, the Governor's residence being but a short distance down the rough, winding lane, which was dignified by the name of street. Colonel Fortune's home was the handsomest, the merriest of them all, a typical frontier mansion. A mansion of those days could be little more than a cottage in these, yet the Colonel's was far brighter than the palace of to-day. In his house gathered chivalrous

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subalterns from English homes and stalwart Virginians of inherited gallantry.

His board was more hospitable than that of the Governor, his favours were coveted even more eagerly than those of his superior. Stern, exacting, yet affable and courteous, he was the idol of a people whose hatred for those who ruled them had wrought ruin more than once.

Mrs. Fortune, a lady of gentle birth, shared the power of her husband.

But there was a colonial queen whose reign was of more consequence to the youth of Jamestown than was that of the august person across the sea. She was queen of hearts, this daughter of theirs, light-hearted Kate Fortune. Daintiest maid in all the land, famed for her wit, her pranks, her loveliness, her dimples and her sunshine, she was the wiliest tempter who ever laid unconscious siege to man's indifference.

The English officers called her an angel, the more deferential Virginians moaned that she was a witch, yet loved her.

In that year, Jamestown was a veritable cauldron of rivals, fair suitors all, some bold, some timid, none hopeful.

Strange as it may appear to those who live these two centuries later, there were no jealousies, no bitterness among them. In those good days the favoured man's best friends were his beaten rivals. Kate's kingdom was not large, but her sceptre was mighty. It was made of tenderness, beauty with discretion, with an occasional shadow of ridicule involved. It was the shadow which her subjects feared more than the rod.

For months the Governor's nephew had been her most ardent admirer, notwithstanding the fact that he had been in Virginia but sixty days. His surrender had been instantaneous.

Ordinarily, the nephew of the Governor, who was a peer of the realm, might be considered a superior rival, but in this instance he was not even feared. He had come to Jamestown with exalted ideas, a haughty demeanour, and what Virginians called a supercilious air. He dressed better, talked better, and lived better, and he seemed to hold every man in the colony at a distance. Friendly, courteous even to the lowest soldier, he still gave the impression that he was condescending, not alone to those beneath, but to those above him. That this man should have drifted to the colonies from the drawing-rooms of London seemed incredible.

Moreover, he had refused to wrestle in the contests at the fort, and had failed to fight the man who had hotly called him a coward in the presence of others.

Tales of his conduct in that and other exhibitions had been spread, and the good-looking young officer was eventually made a laughing-stock. One day, however he pulled the nose of an impudent lieutenant. When the red-faced lieutenant insisted upon satisfaction with swords, he merely turned pale and ignored the challenge.

"I came here to fight the Indians, not to kill my comrades," he had said, and a disdainful laugh followed, bringing a flush to his face as he walked away.

Kate Fortune rather admired the easy elegance of the stranger, yet despised his show of cowardice, the story having come to her promptly enough.

She began to treat him coldly, and he was at last driven to feel that he was her most unwelcome suitor. One day he bluntly asked her why she treated him so unkindly.

"Captain Studford, I will be frank with you," replied the girl. "How can you expect me to admire a man who submits to the ridicule of a whole fort full of men, not one of whom seems able to cope with him in strength or the experience of arms? I am the daughter of an English soldier; that should be sufficient reason for my conduct."

"So I am an object of derision to you, as well as to them," he observed quietly. "I shall not intrude again, Miss Fortune. I am brave enough to tell you for the first time, and in the face of your evident dislike, that I love you better than I ever dreamt I could love a woman."

He was turning away in apparent indifference as he concluded this strange avowal.

Kate planted herself squarely before him, her pretty, perplexed face twitching between a smile and a frown.

"Isn't it cowardly to say that when you know how I feel? You are safe in saying what you already know I could not entertain," she said.

"I would rather not discuss it. You may treat it as a jest, as cowardice, or what you like. I cannot control your treatment of the best thing an honest man has to give a woman."

He left the girl standing upon the tips of her toes in sheer surprise at this extraordinary situation. She was at no time a dignified queen, but she was an inquisitive one.

"But, Captain, you must not go away fearing that I shall treat lightly what you have said to me," she murmured.

"Fearing? Why should I fear your ridicule more than that of others? You are brighter, more bewitching, more tantalising than any woman I have ever known—you are maddening—do you hear? Ah, I crave your pardon for so far forgetting myself as to dwell upon a matter which I should have forgotten in your displeasure.

"By the way, I should like to tell you why I will not accommodate those young fools with a duel, why I have controlled my natural desire to resent their insults.

"I have fought one duel and I have killed a man. These men would have no more chance than that man. You may tell them so. Farewell!"

That same night half-a-dozen young men, with as many maids, dropped in to spend the chilly evening before the Colonel's roaring fires. They were toasting apples, and chatting gaily, when Kate suddenly turned to a young Virginian, and, with taunting eyes, cried:

"Martin Crask, I know why Captain Studford would not fight a duel with you."

"So do I," responded Crask. "Because he feared me."

"'Twas no such reason. He says he does not choose to kill anything but Indians."

A laugh went up from the men.

"The fool! Did he say that to you?" cried Crask.

"He truly did; and, besides, he has fought and killed a man."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Crask disdainfully.

"Did he stab him in the dark?" questioned Farring.

"He lies if he says he fought aught save a boy," sneered Crask.

"Yet he pulled your valiant nose until it was red for near a week," said Kate cheerily.

"Oh, would that I were at him—the coward!" cried Crask, white and trembling.

"You can pull his nose when next you meet him, Martin; it is your turn, you know," said Kate laughingly, and Crask glared at the burning logs in angry silence.

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"Please forgive me, Martin; I did not mean to hurt you by recalling a previous injury," cried Kate, and Crask's pout grew with her contrition.

"I cannot see why you defend the Captain, Miss Fortune," ventured Farring.

"Why not? He will not defend himself."

"But you surely cannot approve a coward?"

"Are you sure he is a coward?"

"I should consider myself one under the circumstances, I believe," he cried evasively.

"Would it not be cowardly to fight Martin Crask if he knew he could kill him?"

"Bah!" came from the angry Crask.

"He could, at least, have given Crask satisfaction for an insult," said Varney. Kate wavered.

"That's true," she said; "he should have been a gentleman. Still, that does not prove him a coward."

"I'll wager that I can prove him a coward," observed Lieutenant Holmes. "And safely, too."

"'Twere wise to do it safely," supplemented Miss Fortune.

"Once, at home, we exposed a boasting captain, who would have had us think him the bravest man on earth——"

"But that does not seem to be Captain Studford's object," interrupted Kate.

"True," went on Holmes, "but that has nothing to do with it. This captain was one night approached by five of his fellow officers, disguised as highwaymen, and despite his declarations that he had fought dozens of men, he ran like a hound, screaming murder all the way. Why not test your captain's courage as we tested ours, Miss Fortune?"

"In the first place, I could not be a very impressive highwayman, and in the second place he might shoot."

"You have plenty of men at your command who would serve as Indians for such an experiment," speculated Varney.

"We all would!" exclaimed Holmes.

"So you might!" she cried. "He would be willing to kill you if you were Indians."

"We might as well give up the plan, for we could not force him to leave town without a bodyguard," sneered Crask.

"Fie! That is easy. Miss Fortune could ask him to ride with her into the forest, and he would go blindly enough," said Holmes.

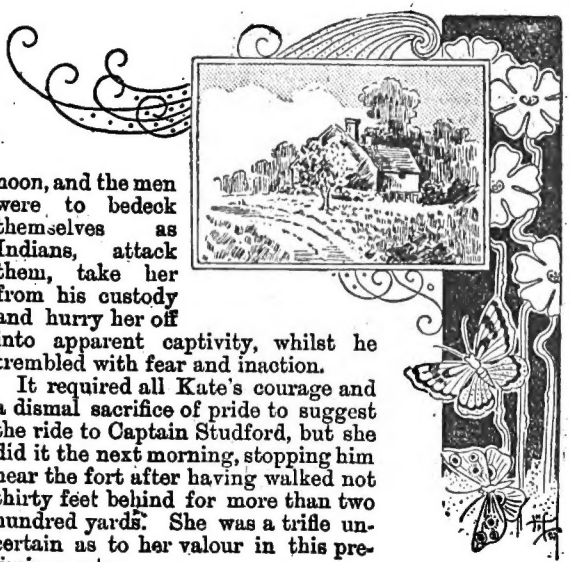
"I?" cried Kate, blushing to think of herself in that position after Studford's declaration. "I could not, would not do such a thing. Prove him a coward, but do not ask me to help you."

"Holmes is right, and Miss Fortune should be willing to make the test. She is his defender; she cannot refuse to satisfy herself of her error in this harmless, yet effective way," announced big Farring, and every member of the party laid siege to Kate's faltering opposition. The fun of it all finally appealed to her, and she rather timidly agreed to the proposition.

But how could she ask him to ride with her after what had passed between them? He would think her unwomanly, and, strangely enough, with that thought she began to feel that she must have his good opinion. Yet she went, half dubiously, into the plot to prove a coward the man she was beginning to admire.

The details of the scheme were submitted by the men, and were as follows:

Kate was to ask him to ride on horseback with her to "Big Fork," five miles through the forest, on some afternoon, and the men were to bedeck themselves as Indians, attack them, take her from his custody and hurry her off into apparent captivity, whilst he trembled with fear and inaction.



It required all Kate's courage and a dismal sacrifice of pride to suggest the ride to Captain Studford, but she did it the next morning, stopping him near the fort after having walked not thirty feet behind for more than two hundred yards. She was a trifle uncertain as to her valour in this preliminary step.

Captain Studford's heart thumped unusually fast as he looked down into the piquant face and blue eyes.

They were very soft and timid this morning—there was something appealing in their tempting depths.

"May I not walk with you? I am going your way," were her first words as she reached his side.

"Whither, pray?"

"Oh, to—" and here she blushed, for in truth she had no destination— "to Anna Corwin's," she concluded in relief.

"But Mistress Corwin lives back yonder. How came you to be going this way?"

"Did I say Anna Corwin?"

"If I am not deaf."

"Then I must have meant someone else; to be sure I did—how foolish of me! I am going to Lucy's. You cannot say, Captain, that she does not live in this direction. I'll not walk with you if you are bound to be particular, though."

"I beg you to forgive me and allow me to walk with you," cried the Captain eagerly.

"I like that much better. No matter if I were going to Anna's and chose a roundabout way, you should not be so impolite as to remonstrate. As a rule, Captain, the men prefer the roundabout way."

"Be it miles, I would walk it with you," cried he, smiling at her merry vanity.

"Oh, would you do that?" she asked, suddenly seeing her way clear. Yet in spite of all, her composure deserted her, and she blurted it out, turning red again. "I am dying to ride to 'Big Fork' to-morrow, but I have no one to accompany me. Would you like to go?" Then to herself: "What a fool he thinks me!"

"Gladly; but are we sure there are no stray Indians about?" he asked rather quickly.

"He is afraid," she thought, with strange disappointment. "If you are afraid, we will not go," she said a trifle coldly.

"Afraid? Not for myself, but for you. We will go if you like, and I should rejoice to meet all the Indians in Virginia if it would please you."

So they made their plans, and she was so loth to

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leave him that he was forced to remind her that they had passed the house of Lucy Gaines a full furlong or more. He left her at the door, his heart exultant.

The next afternoon the two rode forth from Jamestown and into the forest, following the well-made road which led to the westward.

Half an hour previous to their departure, five young men had ridden from the home of Lucy Gaines, strange bundles strapped to their saddles. Above all things, they had cautioned Kate to demand the Captain's proof of marksmanship at a point near Big Fork.

It was with some consternation, notwithstanding all the plotting, that Kate observed the big pistols at the Captain's side and the heavy sword which jangled against his leg. T at jangling sword gave her the tremours, and she cast many furtive glances towards its chain and scabbard. At last she was compelled to ask:

"How can you, I pray, use such a monstrous sword, Captain Stud ord? It must have been made for a giant."

"It was; it was my great-grandfather's over a century ago. See! It is serviceable, even in my hand."

He pulled the gleaming blade, long and heavy, from its scabbard, and swept it downwards through the air so fiercely that it resembled a wide sheet of silver. Kate's blue eyes grew wide with apprehension, a cold chill seized upon her and her ruddy face paled. He returned the weapon to its sheath with such a forceful crash that she started violently in her saddle, her little teeth clicking in sheer fright.

"I could cleave a man's skull in twain as easily as you can cut an apple. Would that we could meet a warlike Indian that I could show how it merits my praise."

"Goodness!" gasped Kate hopelessly. "You would not strike a—a—man with it, would you?"

"If he were an enemy. For you, loved one, I could cut down an army."

Their horses drew more closely side by side, and the fierce, strong hand was gently laid upon her trembling fingers.

Tenderly clasping the little one, the big one raised it until it touched the lips of him who leant across to kiss it.

Their eyes met and he raised his head. His were full of love, hers with a pleading dread, the uncertain quiver between love and fear.

Without a word he dropped the hand, suddenly sick at heart.

"I could die for her, and she despises me," he groaned to himself.

"Oh, what have I—have we done?" she thought, a thousand fears gathering in her heart. "He is no coward, and he will kill one of them! How can I tell him—how can I save their lives? He will despise me! That awful sword! A man's skull! Oh, dear! He called me 'loved one!' How big and strong he is! He called me—how can I keep him from using the sword? The pistols I can manage, and—perhaps they will not be there. He will kill them all—horror upon horror! What have I done? Oh!"

The last exclamation was so loud and so sudden that the pale Captain turned quickly.

"What is it? What is it?"

She laughed wildly, even gleefully, almost in the face of her companion.

"Nothing—nothing at all!" she cried.

"I am glad to have afforded you amusement, Mistress Fortune. You may tear my heart to shreds."

Her manner changed instantly. Tears flew to the blue eyes and her hand crept towards him

"Forgive me, pray, Captain Studford. I—I did not mean to hurt you. I—I—am very foolish, very unkind. You must hate me," she faltered.

"Hate you! How could I? You do not love me—why should I have hoped? I can but blame myself." Her hand had fallen to her side because he had not touched it. "And it is our last afternoon together."

"Last?" she repeated faintly.

"Yes; for I shall not see you again."

"Oh—you—you—do not mean that!"

"I have asked to be transferred to Williamsburg. I—I have not one friend in Jamestown; why should I stay here?" he cried bitterly.

"But you have," she exclaimed eagerly; "you have, I am your friend."

"Friend! That is not what I ask of you," he said almost gruffly.

Silence, broken only by the clatter of the hoofs upon the road, followed his words. In her confusion she had forgotten the terrible sword, but it recurred to her, and with it, the thought which had given birth to her untimely mirth, the thought that was to lead her from the chief predicament into which she had been cast. She would ask the Captain to turn back to Jamestown at once, avoiding the possibility of conflict.

"Captain Studford, I believe we had better turn back." Her face grew crimson beneath his calm gaze.

"As you like. You will grant me time to adjust my saddle girth; it is slipping," he said coolly, dismounting without another word.

They were fully three miles from the village, and in a dense piece of forest. On either side of the narrow road grew the thickest of underbrush with the great, gaunt trees stretching above like silent sentinels.

A suppressed scream suddenly called the Captain's attention to Kate. Her staring eyes were blinking with consternation.

Deep in the underbrush she had seen the form of an Indian warrior. Horrors! The sword!

"What do you see?" cried he, starting towards the now deserted brush.

"Nothing—nothing!" she gasped. The young men were here instead of at Big Fork! "Yes, I mean that red bird. See? Do shoot it for me—I must have it! Isn't it beautiful?" She was excitedly pointing towards a red bird in the top branches of a big oak.

He drew his pistols and deliberately aimed with one of them. The shot missed, and the bird darted away.

"Oh, goodness!" she cried. "Try the other ones."

"But the bird is gone."

"Is it? So it is—but quick! See if you can cut off that twig up there, the one with three red leaves. I wager you cannot. Quick, and then we will ride home."

"Why are you so excited?"

"I am not the least bit excited—I never am! Why do you not shoot at that twig?"

"You try it," he surprised her by saying, pushing a pistol into her hand.

Without a word and without taking aim she blazed away at the sky and his firearms were useless. She handed the smoking pistol to him with a laugh.

"Would it not be awful if Indians came upon us?" she cried, with strange exultation. "But mount, and race with me to the spring!"

As the Captain placed his foot in the stirrup a yell burst from the thicket, an arrow whizzed above their heads, and half-a-dozen fierce warriors were dashing towards them.

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"Do not use your sword!" she screamed.

Before the bewildered soldier could catch his breath an ugly brave was in the road, not ten feet away, knife n hand.

Out whizzed the sword!

Kate screamed in agony, clasping her hand over her eyes.

"They are friends! Do not strike!"

But it was too late.

The streak of steel cut through the air. A sickening thud, a gurgling howl, and the assailant fell, his head half severed from his body. An instant later the big Englishman was in his saddle. A second slash and an Indian at his side went down beneath the ancestral blade.

The two horses plunged forward as a brawny redskin grasped her arm, and she felt herself being dragged to the ground. Then, a hand clasped her other arm, a big form leant over behind her, far across the back of her horse. She heard the hiss as of something cutting the air, the crash as of splitting wood, a scream of agony, and the Indian's ruthless grasp was loosened.

Her horse stumbled and seemed to totter beneath her, but again that arm from aloft exerted itself, and it seemed as if she were being lifted to the tree tops. Almost before she could realise it she was upon another horse, clasped in the arms of the rider, and they were off like the wind.

Suddenly she felt the form of the man who held her so closely drop forward with a groan and then straighten again slowly. Exultant yells came from behind them, several arrows whizzed past, and then naught was heard but the thunder of the horses' hoofs upon the frozen ground. As her eyes opened involuntarily, terror possessing them, they fell upon the scene far behind. Two hundred yards away her own horse lay struggling in the road, two human forms stretched near it, another dragging itself to the roadside. Three feathered Indians were some fifty yards nearer, gesticulating wildly.

Her brain whirled and buzzed, and—consciousness was lost.

When she regained her senses she was lying upon the ground. With feeble eyes she glanced wonderingly about. To a tree near by a horse was hitched, beneath her body were the blankets from the horse and certain garments from the back of man.

All was as a dream; she could account for nothing. Studford was leaning against the big oak coatless and as pale as a ghost. Deep lines stretched across his brow and down his mouth; his eyes were closed, as if in pain.

An involuntary moan escaped her lips, and the Captain was at her side almost before it had died away. She was crying:

"Oh, what have I done! What have I done!"

"Calm yourself, dearest! You are safe, entirely so. See, we are alone, far from those fiends. It is bnt a mile to Jamestown. Be brave and we will soon be at home," he murmured hoarsely, kneeling at her side and lifting her to a sitting posture.

"Home! I can never go home! Oh, you do not know—you do not know!"

"There—there! Now be quiet——"

"How could you know? I am the murderess, I am a wretch! Kill me; I cannot live!" she wailed.

"Hush!" he cautioned lovingly.

"You could not know—you did not know them, Captain Studford!" she cried, sitting bolt upright, glaring wildly about her, then shudderingly plunging her white face against his bosom. "They were not Indians," she almost whispered.

"Not Indians!" he gasped.

"Heaven forgive me, no! It was all a trick—to test your courage—forgive me—to test—to test—oh! and I allowed you to kill them! Heaven forgive me!"

"Are you sure, mother?"

"Speak! Go on! What do you mean?"

"They were our friends—not Indians. My dearest friends! Please Heaven let me die!" she wailed.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, after the first bewildering shock. "A trick—and I have killed—oh, it cannot be true!" He leapt to his feet, allowing her to fall from his side to the ground, where she lay, a wretched, shivering heap.

With a ferocious oath he snatched the big sword from the ground and turned upon her, with eyes blazing, muscles quivering.

She was looking up at him, those wide blue eyes gleaming piteously.

"Kill me!" she murmured, and closed her eyes to await the stroke.

His big arm relaxed, the sword fell from his nerveless grasp, clanging to the ground.

When she re-opened her eyes after an age of suspense, she saw him leaning against the tree, his body shaking with sobs. A second glance and she started to her feet alarmed.

His broad back was covered with blood. Near his left shoulder the clothing was torn and an ugly, gaping wound leered at her.

"Oh," she gasped, "you—you are hurt!"

"Hurt!" he groaned. "They have killed me! You have killed me—you and your friends. I hope you are—satisfied—with—your—see?" As he sank to the ground, he pointed feebly to the cruel arrow which he had torn from his side. It lay not far away, grim and bloody.

The horrified girl glanced at it helplessly and then at the unconscious man, unable to realise. Then she cried aloud in her agony and threw herself upon the prostrate form, moaning:

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"Dead! Dead! Speak to me, Ralph,—look up! I love you—I worship you! You shall not leave me!"

She kissed the pallid face, caressed the chilling head, sobbing:

"Forgive me—forgive me!"

Shortly afterwards the clatter of hoofs upon the road aroused her from the semi-unconscious condition into which her grief had resolved itself. Through the gathering darkness she saw horsemen approaching—Indian riders! A moment later they were dismounting at her side, and well-known voices were calling to her:

"Are you hurt?"

"What has happened?"

"Killed? Good Heavens!"

It was Farring, Crask and the other plotters, wild with excitement.

Their horses were wet from the fierceness with which they had been ridden.

"Do not touch him! You have killed him!" she cried, striving to shield the body from Farring's anxious touch.

"Killed him? Good Heavens, Kate! Where did you meet them?" cried Farring, as Crask pulled her from Studford's side.

"Are you not dead?" she finally whispered to the men.

"We? He killed three of them—split their heads! But the wretches put an arrow into him, after all. What a dreadful thing we have done. Fairly tricked him to his death!" cried poor Crask.

"Then—then it was not you?" cried Kate.

"Heavens, no! We found the Indians dragging their dead from the road, three miles back, and knew that something terrible had happened."

"Thank Heaven! I am spared that! But he must not die—he shall not! I love him! Do you hear? I love him!"

For three weeks the victim of that ill-fated trick hung between life and death. Surgery was crude in the colonies, and the first evidence of restoration was due more to his rugged constitution than to the skill of his doctor.

The poor fellow rolled and tossed upon one of Mrs. Fortune's soft beds, oblivious to the kind offices of those about him.

They had taken him there at Kate's command, and she had worn herself to a shadow with anguish love and penitence. She watched him by day and by night—in her restless dreams; her whole existence was in the tossing victim of her folly. Every twitch of that pain-stricken body seemed to show that he was shrinking from her in hatred.

Her pretty face was white and drawn, the blue eyes dark and pitiful, the merry mouth plaintive in its tender hopelessness.

And those jovial tricksters—those who had jeered over his lack of courage, the testing of which they had undertaken?

They were haunted by their own shame. The fiery Crask, the polished Farring, the ingenious Holmes, with all Jamestown, prayed for his recovery, and spared no pains to bring to life and health the man who had won that which they had relinquished hope of having—Kate's love. They were tender, sympathetic, helpful—true men and good.

Kate could not forget the look of distrust she had seen upon Studford's face as he stood above her with the great sword in his angry hand.

His first thought was to kill her!

Sitting beside him bathing the fevered brow, caressing the rumpled hair, holding his restless hands, she could feel her heart thumping like lead, so heavy had it grown in the fear of his awakening.

Finally the doctors told her that he would recover, that the fever was broken. Then came the day when he slept, cool and quiet, no trace of fever, no sign of pain.

It was then that Kate forsook him, burying herself in her distant room, guilty and heart-broken, fearing above all things on earth the first repellant glance he would bestow upon her. Once, while he slept, she peered through his door, going back to her room, the swimming tears blinding the plaintive blue eyes.

At last, one day, her mother came from the Captain's room and said to her gently:

"Kate, Captain Studford asks why you do not come to see him. He tells me that for three days he has suffered because you have been so unkind. Go to him, dear; he promises he will not plead his love if it is so distasteful to you!"

Distasteful!

The girl grew faint with wonder, her limbs trembled, her lips parted, her eyes blurred, and her ears roared with the rush of blood from her heart.

"Mother!" she whispered, at last, slightly raising herself from the couch on which she was reclining. "Are you sure, mother?"

"That he wants you? My child, his eyes fill with tears when he thinks of you. I have seen them moisten when he lies looking from the window——"

But Kate was gone.

When Mrs. Fortune opened the door to the sick man's room soon afterwards she drew back quickly, closed it again, and, lifting her eyes aloft, murmured:

"God make them happy!"

Maxwell Brown.

He: "Yes, he called me a 'blooming' idiot."

Him: "As if any one could not see that you had gone to seed."

Young Doctor: "I am doing very well. I was called three nights last week."

Old Doctor: "That's good! I hope you never forget to appear annoyed on such occasions."

Dumbleton: "It's funny about Waverly; on shore he is an ideal of courage and fearlessness—a veritable man of iron; but once aboard a ship at sea, his mettle seems to leave him, and he becomes as timorous as a child."

Flasher: "That's natural enough; you can hardly expect one to be a man of iron when he's aboard."

Contributor: "You didn't use my article?"

Editor: "Was it written on both sides of the sheet?"

Contributor: "Yes, sir."

Editor: "Ah, there is where you blundered. It was promptly consigned to the waste-basket. You must write on but one side, sir."

Contributor (six months later): "My last article hasn't appeared."

Editor: "Written on both sides of the sheet, was it?"

Contributor: "But on one side, sir."

Editor: "Ah, you were not discreet. I wrote editorials on the other side of it."

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FATHER AND SON.

It was just six o'clock and nearing the end of September. The old city of Aix-en-Provence wakened lazily. Clothed in white linen, shod in slippers and crowned with a wide-brimmed Panama, M. Roumegas descended to his garden, took up a watering pot, filled it at the pump and began to water his hyacinths, as he did every morning of his life.

With infinite care M. Roumegas watered his hyacinths. One saw plainly that with him it was a serious business, and saw besides that here was not only a man who had nothing else to do, but an old man who had already done much.

Yes, decidedly done much. Few lives had been better filled than his. Till fifty years of age the years had counted double for him. Born in the outskirts of Aix, over there on the edge of the Gardanne, he had gone at fifteen to Marseilles. and gained a few sous by polishing shoes on the Cannebiére, near the Saint Louis racecourse. the clothes on his back, his box, his brushes and blacking, were all he possessed in the world.

Then, how, thirty-five years later, had this poor little bootblack become one of the greatest oil merchants of Provence? How had he been able to retire from business with fortune made and drawing great interest and income from the house created by himself and bearing always his name? By energy, intelligence and probity above all else. Probity! See you, in one word, the great strength of Roumegas, the chief cause of his great success.

One says in a generalising fashion that "honesty is the best policy"—an axiom for rascals that had been constantly put into practice by Roumegas, but without design, one may say spontaneously. It was as easy for him to be honest as for others to be otherwise. He would have died rather than take an unjust advantage, and the recital of an indelicacy put him beside himself; pure as crystal, shining as the sun—such was his reputation. Was there a contest or a dispute to be settled at Aix—M. Roumegas was always the arbiter; advice to be sought—M. Roumegas always the counsellor; a place to be given—M. Roumegas was always the judge to lend the deciding voice.

In the evening, when he went to walk on the Cours, hats were raised to him like flocks of swallows, and the old nobles of the city, so arrogant to people without the distinction of patrician birth, counted it an honour to be the first to salute him. One felt about him an atmosphere of calm and well earned repose. It was a good, honest man that passed.

Such a life merited reward, but Heaven had been unjust to this upright man and had not spared him sorrows. Still young he had lost the wife that he adored, and he remained alone with a babe of six months.

If ever a child was loved by its father, and well brought up besides, it was truly the little Antoine. Roumegas wished to make him not only an honest man like himself, but also an educated man, as he had not been able to be. He had felt the need of it always. It should not be the same with his son.

Oh! the beautiful plans that he made, the poor widower, sitting at his table revising the accounts of the day, between the cradle of the son born to him and the memory of the wife who had died. This little being who slept there so sweetly would one day be his joy and pride. Thanks to him the name of Roumegas, simply honoured to-day, would perhaps become illustrious.

Alas! the father had reckoned without the child. The soil was bad; the flowers sown with so much care did not come up. Not that Antoine was of a naturally vicious disposition—he was indolent, dissipated, weak—weak above all. At college he was the last of his class, which would not be so bad had it mortified him at all; but, unhappily, he lacked self-respect, that two-sided sentiment, sometimes a defect but always a desirable quality. His indolence weighed upon him lightly. It was perfectly useless, it seemed to him, to change his mode of life.

His graduation accomplished with great difficulty, he took up the law, in order to have a show of something; but, his law-reading finished, with more difficulty still, he promised himself cheerfully to do nothing at all.

What good to work? His father was rich, and not everlasting. To the wind with toil and with all save amusement.

And Antoine amused himself, continuing with greater freedom still the unhealthy life of the provincial idler. At the café he smoked perpetually, and ceaselessly swallowed numberless and various concoctions; at the club he played stupidly and heavily, as always, to be doing something. Little by little the fever of play took possession of him, and they were almost certain to find him leaning over the green cloth between three and six in the afternoon, and at night till three or four in the morning.

With other young men of the city, nobles or sons of simple citizens, he sat at baccarat, in the vitiated atmosphere of the club card-room, under the blaze of the gas jets, side by side with Baptistin and Durand, two card-

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room waiters and out-and-out rascals, who, at hours like these, disdained all form, stretched themselves in the great arm-chairs, joined with polite familiarity in all the phases of the game, encouraging this one, laughing with that one, listening to one and the other, but the boon companions of all.

He had recourse to his father.

One night there was a terrible run of ill-luck. The sum lost was heavy. Antoine did not have it. He had recourse to his father, who paid it on condition that he would promise to touch cards no more. Antoine promised. Eight days later he lost again. Fearing to confess the thing to M. Roumegas, whose immovable honesty frightened him, and who would not have been able to "comprehend it," as he said, Antoine borrowed.

Then began for him that fevered life of the gambler, with its alternating luck and ill-luck, its ups and its down, its joys always incomplete, its despairs always profound.

In order to provide funds Antoine played more furiously than ever. Strange as it may seem, luck, hitherto so hard and coy, turned in his favour. He won—won always—won as he wished and all that he wished.

Briefly, at thirty years of age, Antoine was the most absolute, the most complete nonentity it is possible to imagine.

In the city his name was never mentioned without a smile and a shrug of the shoulders; but when they met him in the street, that great, ruddy blonde, with heavy eyes and wearied face, regular featured and handsome, nevertheless, clothed with an elegance too foppish for a gallant of the province, they hesitated to bow to him till they thought of the father, and then the hats were raised. Antoine was saved by the name of Roumegas.

The poor old merchant suffered profoundly. His beautiful dreams of paternal ambition had flown away. He had done all he could to arrest his son on that fatal down-hill slope, but reasoning, threats, nothing that he could do had effect upon that weak and indolent nature. M. Roumegas had thought even of sending him among strangers, but in spite of all he loved devotedly this unworthy son, and he had not been able to decide to part with him.

Wounded in his hopes, his love and his self-respect, poor Roumegas had aged quickly. At seventy years you would have taken him for eighty; under his big straw hat his face appeared as wrinkled as a withered apple; his hair like silver threads, his form, already short, still more contracted, and going from bed to bed in the length of the garden, he was forced at times to rest the "sprinkler" on the ground to ease his weakened hand. He seemed like a little white old doll in the midst of the sunlight and flowers.

* * * * *

A hesitating step crunched on the gravel of the walk, M. Roumegas turned about; Antoine was before him, pale, leaden-tinted, with linen soiled, disordered hair and bloodshot eyes. The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, you've come!" said he, "and at such an hour! You should be ashamed of yourself! But come, go up to bed and try to be down by twelve o'clock."

With another shrug of the shoulders, full of weariness and resignation, he began again to water his dear hyacinths. Antoine did not stir.

"Father—" began the young man, taking a step forward.

This time Roumegas put down the sprinkler, placed his spectacles on his nose, and in a tone half-vexed, half indulgent, demanded:

"Well, out with it; what is it now?"

"Last night—at the club—" began Antoine, plucking up courage.

"You have played! You have lost again! Ah! misfortune of my life! You will kill me! And your promise to me, too! No matter, you have played; but one thing remains to do—to pay, to pay always, while a sou is mine! It is the honour of the Roumegas! Well, how much is it?"

Antoine was silent still.

"It is not play, then? Then, what is it? A quarrel? You have been insulted? You are going to fight? Ah, these gambling dens! where they smoke, drink, dispute, play, and——"

He stopped suddenly. A terrible thought had flashed into the old man's brain. Trembling, with shaking, supplicating hands, he turned toward his son.

"You—you have cheated?" stammered he.

Antoine's head sunk lower still.

Mon Dieu! It was true, then? His son, he, a Roumegas, was a cheat, a trickster, a thief? The poor father staggered as if struck with a fist.

"Father!" cried Antoine, springing to sustain him.

"Stop, do not touch me!" cried the old man sternly, gasping for breath but still waving him back, "but go, go to your room—your room, I say."

"But, father," cried Antoine, "let me explain a word. I am not as guilty as you think. I have been led away——"

"To your room—to your room!" repeated Roumegas inflexibly.

The son obeyed. Bending his tall form like one condemned, he passed into the house, and up the stairs that led to his chamber. Behind, with head erect, glittering eyes, and short, firm steps, the father ascended with him.

They entered the chamber together—a square, commonplace room, with windows facing the street, in great disorder, and evidently lived in but little. Torn books thrown here and there; and on the walls, hunting guns, swords, and pistols; on all the furniture, chairs, tables, and desks, pipes, pots of tobacco, and cigarettes M. Roumegas closed the door behind him and turned to his son.

"Speak," said he.

Antoine sunk heavily on his unmade bed, and, with eyes on the ground, stifled voice, and nervously twisting

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an end of the sheet in his feverish fingers, sought to comply.

"The first time," said he, "that I asked you for money, I promised to play no more. I had not the strength. I played again. I lost again. I d d not dare to ask you again. I lost, lost always. Then someone proposed to me to go into partnership with him—to play together. We still lost. He, the one that counselled me, prepared the cards, and I—had the weakness to accept. A madness, father; a madness, only! Pardon me!"

Antoine half rose with arms held out to his father.

"Continue," said Roumegas, erect before him, his own arms held crossed, his face set like flint.

"Last night," resumed Antoine, "they had suspicions, and we would have been caught but for me. They know nothing yet—understand, of me, I mean—and if Baptistin does not speak——"

"Baptistin, the club-room waiter, a valet, your accomplice! Unhappy boy, to what depths have you fallen?"

"But they know nothing, nothing as yet, I tell you. Other players in the game are suspected as well as I. Baptistin only is arrested. He will not speak."

"And you would leave him to bear the blame of all? To preserve the little honour that still remains to you, you would escape at the expense of him and others? Know you, Antoine, that this is infamy, nothing more nor less?"

"But father, father, I promise that for the future——"

"The future? You still believe, then, that there is a future for you?"

The sound of footsteps was suddenly heard in the quiet, sunny street. They stopped at the house door. Antoine sprang from the bed, panting for breath. The bell rang. The young man rushed to the window.

"Baptistin has told!" said he, in a strangled whisper, with an ashen face.

M. Roumegas looked in his turn. The Commissaire of Police stood at the door, accompanied by two members of the club, and two police officers. Roumegas let the curtain fall, strode across the wide chamber, took a revolver from the wall, assured himself that it was loaded, and held it to his son, gazing at him now with wide, startled eyes.

"Here," said he, "take it."

Antoine raised his hand mechanically, comprehending nothing. Below stairs the street door had opened. A colloquy was going on between the servant and the arrivals. The muffled sound of the voices was plainly heard in the chamber.

"Since you have lost your own honour," the father continued, "save ours, at least. Come, there is no time to lose."

The colloquy was finished. The steps sounded loud on the stones of the staircase, an old staircase, broad and sonorous as a chapel. They arrived at the door. Antoine shook convulsively.

"Coward!" murmured Roumegas. "Coward to the end!"

And then, still with unfaltering hand, he turned the revolver, aimed at the brow of his son and pulled the trigger.

They knocked at the door. Placing the still smoking weapon by the side of the body, Roumegas threw back the bolt, and pointed to the corpse lying across the bespattered bed.

"Too late, messieurs," said he, "he has done justice to himself."

HARRY SYDNEY.

RESULT OF DISTRIBUTION No. 6.

FOUR applicants receive a sovereign each this week. Their names are:

MISS S. YENDOLE, 53 Raymond Street, Dublin.

A. G. POPE, 70 Constance Street, Silvertown, E.

MISS M. L. COLLINS, Trevelyan School, 9 Trevelyan Street, Eccles, Lancs.

J. D. McAra, 57 Pemberton Road, Harringay, N.

Those who did not apply are:

W. J. Roome, 2 Whitehall Buildings, Ann Street, Belfast; Miss M. M. Forse, Englefield Green, Surrey; Mrs. Foulkas, 29 Sandy Road, Seaforth, near Liverpool; A. Sillito, Amington, Tamworth, Staffs; W. Leslie, 1 Paunermill Cottages, Aberdeen; S. Bevan, 8 Stanley Terrace Mount Pleasant, Swansea; J. R. Ibbotson, 18 Portway, West Ham, E.; I. W. Wright, 70 Mildmay Grove, N.; F. Gibbons, Moorland Road, Bournemouth; R. Keddy, 94 Milbourne Street, Carlisle; George Hunt, 24 Hinckley Road, Nuneaton; C. H. Kingdon, 41 Victoria Street, Newport, Barnstaple; Josh Little, Bank Road, Hoylake, Cheshire; R. Pugh, King Street, Oswestry; H. L. Shaw, 2 Saudringham Villas, Ashfield, Ross; M. Bennetts, 95 Bath Street, Ilkeston; W. Hancock, 2 Castle Place, Nottingham; T. E. Smith, 28 Ash Street, Bootle, Liverpool; F. M. Kew, 3 Albert Terrace, Farnborough R.S.O., Kent; C. Kille, 1 The Avenue, Minehead, Somerset; Miss E. Bringloe, 34 Tremlett Grove, Junction Road, N.; W. King, 105 Gaythorne Road, West Bowling, Bradford; J. Jackson, 5 Hanover Place, Coleraine; C. Cornelius, High Street, Killarney; T. Yates, 12 King Street, Leek; David Mills, 93 High Street, Ayr; J. Penlerick, 14 Berkely Place, Falmouth; C. Condy, Endsleigh Place, St. Mary Church; B. Isaacs, 41 Beaufort Street, Builth; J. Blunt, Aylesbury Street, Fenny Stratford; J. Donald, 74 Palace Road, Streatham; Rev. J. C. Brown, 37 Market Street, Haddington; Percival Owen, 98 High Street, Thame; F. Sharpe, 9 Waller Street, Luton; Mrs. Barber, 66 Midland Road, Wellingborough; J. Bloxham, 28 Main Street, Oldham; T. Worth, 27 Market Street, Stalybridge; John Young, 24 Marshall Place, Perth; D. H. Brown, 8 Lower Meyrick Street, Pembroke Dock; A. Blenkinsop, 13 Exmouth Street, Leeds; H. S. Hill, *Western Morning News* Office, Plymouth; D. Harrison, 52 London Road, Stoke-on-Trent; J. Ray, 34 Brewery Street, Kate's Hill, Dudley; J. Abel, High Street, Lye, Stourbridge; H. Barker, 1 Clarence Road, Croydon; W. H. Barnett, Market Place, Oakham.

A NEW SERIAL

ENTITLED

SANDY CARMICHAEL

Will begin in the Christmas Number of

. . Short Stories. . .

IT IS BY **C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE,**

Author of "The Adventures of Captain Kettle" in

PEARSON'S MAGAZINE.

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CAP AND GLOVES.

"Oh, yes! And I forgot to tell you. You know your old flame is to be married in a few weeks?"

"Is she? Which?"

"You had a good many, hadn't you? Well, guess!"

"Let me see. Madeline Pierce. Oh, you tell me, sis! I'm too tired to guess. That train has shaken me all to pieces in the last fifty miles."

"Well, then, if you're too tired to exert your mind—Edith Barton."

"Oh! And she marries—?"

"Bob Bristol, of all men. Old enough to be her father, isn't he?"

Cortrell had been away five years in Scotland, and was spending his first long holiday at home with his mother and sister. He had come back, it seemed to him, much more than five years older. There was upon him now the steadying pressure of great responsibilities, for he was now a prominent official in a large business enterprise.

All that he saw—even the faces of his mother and sister—reminded him of what he had been, and he found himself, as he stretched at full length on the couch, wondering how he could ever have been so frivolous, and so joyously careless of consequences in everything, as he had been in the days that now seemed to him to belong to the dim distance of history.

"So women can forget sometimes, you see," said his sister, continuing her talk.

Bob's thoughts were wandering back to the past. Presently he exclaimed somewhat suddenly:

"By jingo, Clara, I believe I have something! Let me see. When do you say Edith is to be married?"

"In about five weeks, I believe."

"I wonder whether I ought to take it to her, or send it?"

"Send what? Wedding present?"

"Eh? Yes, of course, I must send a wedding present. I knew Bristol quite well. He's an older man than I am, isn't he?"

That evening Charles Cortrell unpacked a big leather trunk in the privacy of his own room. He took out a tin box that looked as if it had been designed originally to hold cash. He unlocked the box and took out package after package. Last of all, right at the bottom, was some tissue paper, and neatly folded in the tissue paper were a pair of very much faded kid gloves.

Cortrell took out the tissue paper package, replaced the various bundles, locked the tin box, and sat down to think.

He laid the faded gloves on a little writing table before him, drew up a chair, rested his elbows on the table, and supported his head on his two hands. As the faint odour of the gloves came to his nostrils, a smile, half of amusement, half of tenderness, played over his face.

"But the question is, how am I to do it?" he said aloud to himself after some minutes of brooding.

The smile on his face grew more and more tender. Presently he sighed, and then spoke again to himself.

"That has nothing to do with it now, old man. That was long ago. Yes, you can't keep these things now. You've got to do it."

Edith Barton certainly had been a little disconcerted when the news came to her that her sweetheart of five years before had suddenly made his appearance in the town just at the time when her engagement to Bristol had been made public.

She was not vividly conscious of any feeling for Charles Cortrell that could have been construed as disloyalty to her *fiancé*, but she knew only too well how recklessly tongues will wag in a small town, where each man's—or woman's—business is the business of all, and, considering many things, Cortrell's sudden appearance just then, after a continuous absence of five years, might very plausibly be made to bear a significance that would disturb the smooth surface of her engagement. There had been rumours that Mrs. and Miss Cortrell would, some time or other, go North to make their home with Charlie, but no one had expected to see him back in his former home.

Edith sat before the fire two days after Cortrell's arrival, and was meditating over these things, when Cortrell himself was announced. She was looking for a visit, not from him, but from Bob Bristol. Nevertheless she found little or no difficulty in meeting him with conventional care.

At first, that is. Her old friend—or sweetheart—lost but little time in coming to the particular business of his call, and it certainly startled her a little when he said:

"I am very glad I found you alone."

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"Glad?" she said. "Oh, yes. It is nice to be able to have a little chat. Tell me about what you have been doing up there."

"I can tell you about that at some other time," said Cortrell. "Just at present I have to discharge a duty. Oh, yes. It wouldn't be right. At least, I wouldn't like it, if I were in Bristol's place."

"Like what?" said the girl.

"This!" And he took a tissue paper packet from his pocket.

Edith opened the packet, wondering. When she saw the old gloves lying there, with the marks of wear of many years ago upon them, but also marked with the folds of many other—later—years of careful keeping, a whole procession of memories passed before her mind. She was silent for some moments.

"What ought I to do with them?" she asked. "I don't know. Tell me."

Not the least doubt of it, the whole affair was excessively silly. It was thoroughly in keeping with the rest that now this young woman, on the eve of marriage with another man—a marriage into which no one had forced her—should be looking with pitiful appeal in her eyes and with tears, at a man who had flirted with her five years before. Still, silly as it was, it was so.

Cortrell, on his part, looked extremely uncomfortable. He may have been wishing that he had sent the old gloves by post, or by messenger; but then again he may not have been altogether sorry to see that appealing look and those swimming eyes.

"I—I don't know," he stammered. "Perhaps I ought not to have brought them. But I don't see why not. I don't see how I could have kept them, could I?"

"You might have burnt them, mightn't you?" Edith said, with a rather mischievous smile.

"So I might," Cortrell answered quickly. "I give you my word, Miss Barton—I beg you to believe me—I never thought of that."

The manifest sincerity with which this was said and the ingenuous blush that accompanied the explanation were irresistible. Edith burst into a hearty laugh, which Cortrell was not long in taking up. But at that moment the street door was opened, and then the door of the room, where these two stood laughing over an old pair of gloves, and the servant girl, in her directed and distinctive manner, announced, "Mr. Bristol."

There was nothing really embarrassing in the situation; the embarrassment was only apparent. The event might have been different if all the persons concerned had looked at the case as it should have been looked at. But while the girl, with characteristic candour, saw only the reality, Cortrell was, for some reason, impressed chiefly by the appearance. Bristol, perhaps naturally, reflected Cortrell's view.

He at once walked to the table and, lifting the gloves, said, with eyebrows raised, "A present? Won't you let me into your joke?"

"How are you, Bristol?" Cortrell said, holding out his hand. "I hope you haven't forgotten me."

The worst of it was that Edith was still laughing. And there were the gloves. Bristol appeared to think that the situation demanded a display of quiet dignity.

"I remember you perfectly, Mr. Cortrell," he said, bowing slightly. "May I ask again what amuses you so much?"

Edith became serious in a moment, and, as she became serious she became angry.

"It isn't very much of a joke, Bob," she said. "If you insist on having it, however, Mr. Cortrell has just found an old pair of gloves of mine and has brought them to me, because it didn't occur to him to put them in the fire. Isn't it funny?"

"I hardly think so," Bristol answered. "Perhaps I might appreciate the joke better if I knew where Mr. Cortrell found these gloves."

As Cortrell opened his mouth to make some answer to him, Edith, putting up her hand, said:

"This is my business. I'm afraid you will not have an opportunity of fully appreciating the joke, Mr. Bristol, until you manage to get yourself into a better humour for that sort of thing."

She very carefully folded up the gloves and laid them behind the clock on the mantelpiece, while Cortrell stared at her and Bristol stood biting his nether lip.

Then there was an awkward pause for some moments, until Cortrell said something about going.

"Why, I've hardly had ten words with you yet, Mr. Cortrell," Edith said, with a wicked glance at the other man. "Please don't go yet. Perhaps—perhaps I may find something of interest to show you, if you'll wait a little longer."

"Then perhaps I had better call at some other time," Bristol said.

It was a very awkward situation indeed. Bristol could not stay after this last observation of his, and Cortrell could not run away after Edith's pressing invitation.

Half an hour later Cortrell said:

"What did you mean by saying that you might find something interesting to show me?"

"Did I?" said Edith. "Do you hold me to it? It occurred to me suddenly. Wait here.

"Do you recognise this?" And she suddenly produced an old faded red velvet smoking cap, with sides pulled down and an absurd tassel at one side.

"By Jove!" Cortrell exclaimed.

"Yes," said Edith. "You had to go home bareheaded."

"It was that night, wasn't it, after we had all been to the mill—"

"Remember the water rats?"

"And you would pull off your gloves and try to reach water lilies."

Edith nodded. "And you wouldn't give them back to me."

"Jack stole my cap, didn't he?"

"Yes, and I made him give it to me—to keep in pledge for my gloves."

"When did you find that old cap, Miss Barton?"

"About a week ago," Edith said, looking a little confused. "I didn't know you were coming home then."

"Of course you were going to send it to me?"

"Of course I was."

"By the way, didn't it occur to you to burn it?"

They both burst out laughing once more.

As for the story that Bristol and Cortrell had high words after that, and that mutual friends with difficulty prevented them from fighting a duel, there never was anything in it. Bristol was a sensible man at bottom, even though irascible at times. He made some sort of an apology to Edith Barton for his exhibition of temper.

But the Bristol-Barton wedding was postponed in a quiet way. It never came off. The Cortrell-Barton wedding came off instead, though not until a year after the incident of the cap and gloves.

E. Fairfax.

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THE PACKAGE OF GEMS.

He had been a friend of my boyhood—one of many. I had not seen him for twenty years, but the day I saw him last had been as yesterday always, I remembered him so distinctly.

He was handsome and loved the things I loved, including a pretty girl who had gone her own way, in spite of us, long, long ago. I made a point of finding him when I came to London.

"You must come home with me to-night," he said. "I am living alone this summer, and we can have a long talk."

I went home with him gladly, and was surprised at the plain way of living he had cut out for himself. He took me to a little flat and cooked his dinner and mine, and served it with his own hands. He had been a bit reckless at college, and along with high honours had carried off a reputation for extravagance that had had its influence on local prophecy.

"I'm leading a simple sort of life," said he as he passed the coffee. "Prodigality is one of the great sins of our generation—great because it is the father of so much evil. Many of the people in great houses in the West End are living on money that doesn't belong to them. They're living a lie, an imposture. I know what it is, for in a small way I've had my share of it. I've come at last to being just what I am, without fear, without shame—a poor devil who works for his living. I have no worry over debts and no fear of to-morrow."

"You surprise me, Jack," I said. "You once had the habit of spending, I remember."

"I know, I know," he said as he lit a cigar, "and it took me into the fire. It's a long story and I don't mind telling you, as we've gone so far, if you care to listen."

Assured of my interest he began his story.

"I married soon after coming here and went to live in a good neighbourhood. Was with a diamond importer, had a fair salary and remarkable success in my line. My work was to look after local dealers, and hard work it was, for I had to keep them coming continually to look at our stock.

"We had a large house. My wife was attractive and popular, and we had a lot of company and went about a good deal. Of course, I can talk to you frankly, Ned. We went the pace, and I found that we were spending more than I was earning.

"It wasn't my wife's fault, she would have put up with little. But I was proud of her and she was fond of dress. I gave her no word of warning or hint of my trouble.

"Well, the dogs of debt were after me in due time, a big pack of them, baying like hounds on the track of the quarry. I put on a cheerful face at home and cut my own expenses to the last farthing for the sake of my family; gave up cigars and billiards and all that. To be sure, my family should have come down to plainer living. I should have seen the breakers ahead and turned into smooth water. I thought of it night and day, but I couldn't see my way to doing the right thing. I tell you it's hard to turn back when those you love must suffer for it, walking down with you to the lowlands of humiliation.

"To sum it up, I thought of them and it made a coward of me. I kept on hoping and planning and praying for some bit of good fortune to help me out of my trouble. My eldest daughter—poor girl! she's dead now—had a fine voice. She would have made a prima donna, everybody said that. She should have had a thorough training in music. I tried to find a way to it.

"Every day of my life I was tortured by that problem, and I lay awake at night thinking and planning. I was sure that a couple of hundred pounds invested for that purpose would bring back a fortune. My wife and I had a long talk about it one evening—the frankest talk we had had about money. She planned how she could cut her expenses every week enough to pay for the lesson.

"It worked for a while, but my creditors were closing in on me, and it took more to keep them off my back. The small saving we had made by cutting down expenses, and more, was swallowed up by my new obligations.

"Then it seemed to me that I had robbed Peter to pay Paul, and had added my family to my list of creditors.

"My career had come near a crisis one day. I had to take some money home with me—a good bit of it. The rent had not been paid for six months; I owed the music teacher, the butcher and the baker as much as they would stand; I had fifteen shillings in my pocket. I was near a sharp turn.

"It was midwinter. The darkness had fallen early, and everybody had left the office but me. We had been taking an inventory of stock, and I had more stuff to handle than any of the others. In a drawer of my safe there was a package of 'sorts,' as they call them—stones that were off colour and imperfect. It had lain there for years, and I had handled it a hundred times.

"I had opened this package and counted the stones, and was folding it when I heard the latch of the door rattle. I stopped and looked about me. Nobody had opened the door; I could hear no sound in the shop. My heart was going like a sledge-hammer. Of a sudden I heard a whisper.

"'A good idea!' it said.

"I jumped as if one had pricked me deep. Heavens! those words had come out of my own mouth. I leant over on the desk in front of me and an awful horror came into my heart. The tears came into my eyes, but in a moment I had pulled myself together. Then I heard that whisper again.

"'Fool!' it said, 'you're no thief. You will put them back in a little while—within a year, anyhow.'"

My friend had whispered these words hoarsely, and then he sat still a moment looking down. He nervously took a sip of water.

"I don't know that I ought to tell you all this," he went on presently. "Somehow I like to tell it, and I've gone so far that I must finish."

"No matter what comes," I said, "I shall think none the less of you, Jack."

"Well," he said, "I put the package in my pocket, walked out, and secured a loan on the gems.

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"Well, I took a late train home, and I had the money I needed—about two hundred pounds. At the station I met my butcher and paid him. That was an unfortunate thing; I was up to my neck in it then.

"As soon as I had done it the devil left me. There came no other word of hope or encouragement. I was a fearful creature all at once, afraid to go home and face my wife.

"She was waiting for me when I came in. It was near eleven o'clock, and they were all in bed but she.

"'What's the matter, dear?' she whispered when I entered the bedroom and sank into a chair. 'You are pale and you stagger. What is the matter?'

"'Headache!' I answered, lying back in the chair and closing my eyes. 'Just one of my headaches.'

"'I've had an awful evening,' said she, bathing my head with eau de cologne. 'I've been thinking about you for some reason. I'm sure we've been living too expensively. Don't you think so, dear? I wish you'd talk with me about those things. I'm afraid I've been very thoughtless all my life. We'd better give up the house and go into a little flat. I shall be just as contented and happy as I am here, and you'll have less worry.'

"She knelt beside me and put her arms about my neck, and I was near breaking down.

"'Too tired to talk,' I whispered, 'turn down the light; it hurts my eyes.'

"I felt as if I were on the brink of a precipice, and thought the darkness would hide my peril from me. Every caress of my wife hurt me like the blow of a whip.

"What a relief at last when the darkness of the night covered me in my own bed!

"'I know what I shall do,' I said to myself, 'I can borrow that money off somebody and go and get the package.'

"'You're in trouble,' whispered my wife tenderly the next morning. 'Tell me what it is.'

"I made no answer for a moment, and suddenly I saw a little of God's purpose in making good women.

"'I'm a thief, dear—a thief,' I whispered.

"'You're crazy! My husband is no thief,' she answered proudly, and facing me as she would a slanderer.

"Well, Ned, I knew what a woman's love can do and suffer that morning; what it is to have a wife who is a true helpmate. I told her everything—laid my heart bare.

"'Put on your coat;' said she when I had finished. 'We must go at once and see Fordham and give him that money and tell him the whole truth—we must go.'

"We went away in the early morning. Neither of us spoke, but both were thinking the same thoughts, I suppose, and we walked as one person.

"It was still early when we came to the house of Mr. Fordham. He was the head of the firm. We rang the bell.

"I shall not try to tell you all that happened after they let us in. It is too painful. Men are apt to be hard on a fellow who's down.

"Fordham was that kind of a man. He had no pity for either of us, and I went to the police station that morning.

"I shall never forget the face of the magistrate the morning I came into the court. He'd some good mercy in him.

"'What have you to say?' he inquired.

"'Nothing,' I answered, 'except that I am guilty.'

"'Have you consulted a solicitor?'

"'No, sir,' I answered; 'I have no defence to make.

"'I shall not accept the plea,' he said.

"'Tell me about it—tell me everything,' he continued.

"When I had finished he turned his face away and sat thinking a moment.

"Then he sentenced me to one day's imprisonment, so I was free that same afternoon."

My friend rose and went and stood by the window in silence.

"It's a humble home," said he, coming back presently to sit by me, "but we're very happy here. My wife and daughter will return to-morrow, and I want you to stay and meet them." J. ERVINE.

FIFTY GOLDEN SOVEREIGNS GIVEN AWAY EVERY WEEK.

Every week the Editor of SHORT STORIES addresses fifty envelopes to fifty people in various parts of the country. Inside each envelope he places a sovereign, and locks them away in his private safe.

SIMPLY TAKE A POST-CARD and address it to the Editor under the following conditions:

☞ Ask if a sovereign has been addressed to you, giving your full name and address clearly written in ink.

Fifty names and addresses have been picked out at random from directories, etc., etc.

No sovereign, however, will be awarded unless it is applied for, so it would be advisable for you to tell your friends to drop us a post-card, whether they are readers or not.

All applications for No. 9 distribution must reach us by December 5th, addressed to The 9th Sovereign Editor, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Each application must be made separately.

Result of the Sixth Distribution appears on page 713.

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OLD RELIABLE.

Big, burly, good-natured Jack Woodford, the most popular engine driver on the line, ran the Limited Express eight years and eleven months.

Ordinarily a modest man, Jack was proud of his family and his railway record. Having married late in life, his family was small, consisting of a wife—a little woman, who led him by despotic power of pure love and faithful devotion—and two toddlers—Jimmy, aged five, and Sallie, a midget of three.

His record was absolutely clear; to acquire and retain such a record requires constant care and quick wit in emergencies.

Realising his position, Jack prized it highly. The time schedule was frequently shortened to meet the competition of opposing lines, and, with increasing business, the train became so heavy that to make time with it became a problem. One after another, engine-drivers were appointed to run in opposition to Jack, but, with discouraging regularity, they were removed for inability to make the time. Jack alone remained.

You are not to understand that during all those years his train had arrived at, and departed from, all stations with chronometric accuracy. That, indeed, would verge on the impossible.

There is a limited amount of time that may be lost without censure, and it was in accomplishing this feat with the Limited, in spite of the drawbacks, that Jack Woodford had established a record.

One perfect June day Jack's engine stood at the head of her train, the incarnation of latent power. The gentle regular puffing of the air pump exhaust gave her the appearance of enjoying a quiet smoke while waiting. She glistened and shimmered in the sun with a profusion of polished metal.

Jack was ready, his left hand grasping the throttle lever, and his head turned, watching the conductor for the signal to go. He had inspected her thoroughly, and had assured himself that everything was right, yet he was uneasy.

The recent heavy rains had fouled the water in the tanks along the road, causing it to foam in the boiler—nothing very serious or unusual on a locomotive, but there was no time to bother with foaming boilers on the Limited—no time for anything but to run at the very highest speed obtainable. Both Jack and his partner had reported "Boiler washed" on their last two trips, but, being a week ahead of her regular wash-out day, the foreman had not chosen to disorganise the routine of his work to accommodate a couple of men.

Jack might have reported him, but that wasn't his way, and, besides, he had promised to wash her out next journey, for certain.

The last passenger entered, the guard waved a signal to Jack; there was a hissing and spitting from cylinder cocks, and she was off.

Before he got clear of the station, Jack eyed the cocks uneasily—something was unsatisfactory beyond a doubt, he felt it.

But he gave the usual wave of the hand to the little group in the garden of his cottage just outside the town. There was an answering flutter of handkerchiefs, and the wife and babies gazed wistfully for a moment, their faces illumined with a light not due to the June sunshine, at the disappearing dust cloud left by the train at the curve.

The engine commenced working water at the first heavy grade, and Jack lost a minute. After that the fireman could count the mile-posts by the nervous snapping of Jack's watch-case. By taking water at a certain tank he could go in without stopping for water again, otherwise he would have to make two water stops, but it was there that he got the bad water on the last run, and it had caused him worry enough.

* * * * *

He had learnt that the water was about all alike on the road, but he determined, nevertheless, to make the two water stops; it might be a little better in the other tanks. He regained ten seconds of the lost time before reaching the water-plug.

Admonishing the fireman to hurry, he jumped down and oiled, finding, to his great relief, all bearings stone cold. In spite of their haste, he left here a minute and a half late, and she behaved so badly that he arrived at the next station two minutes behind time.

He was only half way yet, and the prospect was pretty blue. The next station was a junction from which three engines ran on a branch out to some coal-mines. One of them would be there when he arrived. He telegraphed ahead to have her ready for him, his engine being disabled.

His guard and an old friend, Phil Howard, as well as every regular traveller in the train, knew that Jack's record was in danger at last.

As the train pulled up at the station, all hands were ready to assist in uncoupling the engine. But in the midst of the hurry Howard called to him:

"Ah! Here's a funeral to go."

While the casket was being got on board, the station-master handed Jack a message which read: "No engine here. Have forwarded your message to Leyland."

* * * * *

Leyland had been the junction at one time. There were large sheds there, and several engines. The deferential care with which a casket must be handled caused them to leave that station three full minutes late—the limit. Neither Jack nor Howard knew that the other guard had uncoupled the air-hose, and in the bustle at the station, that worthy had forgotten to couple it again. So Jack pulled out with no brakes on the train, and determined not to lose any more time if it was possible to avoid it.

The shed foreman at Leyland received an order to have an engine ready to take the train on its arrival. She was due in twenty-five minutes, and, wondering what could have happened to "Old Reliable," as Jack was popularly called, he got his whole force on the work. Within five minutes of the train's arriving time he had an engine coaled, watered, and ready to start, standing on the main track just beyond the station. It was a good job, well and quickly done.

Jack would cut the "87" off, run up behind the extra engine, and back in on the siding. The man in charge of the extra engine would back down alongside, Jack and his fireman would move their things to her and back on to the train. The whole manœuvre would be carried out while the passengers and luggage were getting off and on, without losing any time.

After leaving W———, the "87" behaved a little better; she had thrown out much of the offending matter,

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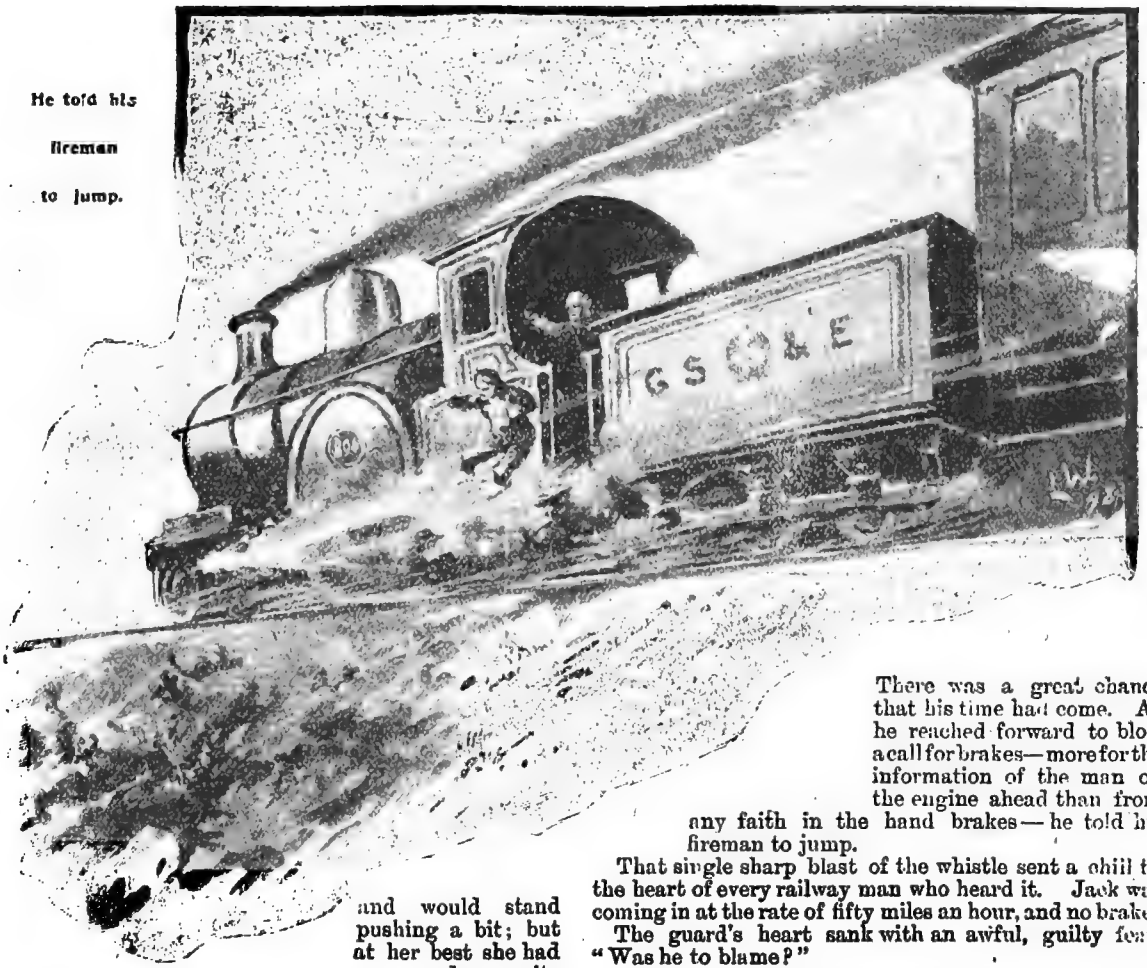

He told his fireman to jump.

and would stand pushing a bit; but at her best she had never made up quite a minute between there and Leyland—and she was far from being at her best now.

Jack took advantage of every little point in the line, and worked all he could to swing her along. She would gain a few seconds here, and drop them again there; it was a close, hard fight—one that many men would have given up in despair, but he stayed right with her to the end.

When he reached the summit of the hill from which he could look down into Leyland, a mile away, he knew he would arrive there only two and a half minutes late—technically in time. He knew to an inch how far he could use steam, and it was with a sigh of relief that he shut her off and dropped the lever down. He blew for the station, glanced curiously at the air-brake gauge—which showed the proper pressure—and leant wearily over the side with his hand on the brake-valve.

As the train rolled rapidly down the grade, he applied the brake-gently, to slow it up. He felt at once that it had no hold. He glanced in alarm at the gauge, and turned the valve all the way round. The truth flashed over him with a paralysing chill. He had no brake!

He set his teeth grimly, and the grey eyes flashed with determination as he swung his great weight on the reverse lever and turned her over into the back motion.

There was a great chance that his time had come. As he reached forward to blow a call for brakes—more for the information of the man on the engine ahead than from any faith in the hand brakes—he told his fireman to jump.

That single sharp blast of the whistle sent a chill to the heart of every railway man who heard it. Jack was coming in at the rate of fifty miles an hour, and no brake!

The guard's heart sank with an awful, guilty fear. "Was he to blame?"

The stoker leapt from the extra engine and ran half way across the yard. The signalman showed a blanched face at his window, and tried to think whether he had made a mistake.

Phil Howard, the veteran, understood his friend's wild appeal for help. Regardless of probable consequences, he jumped to a brake-wheel. But the onward rush of ten heavy express carriages was not to be checked by a single hand-brake.

With a crash and a roar, "87" ran her nose under the other engine's tender; she threw it, crumpled and battered, clear over its own boiler. The spare engine shot ahead, but again "87," her drivers sliding, was driven into her like a ram.

This time Jack's engine was derailed, and, as she ploughed into the ties, the force from behind slued her round, and turned her over on top of him.

* * * * *

The radiant light has gone from the eyes of the widow and her orphans; but it is one of the valued traditions of the line to this day that Jack Woodford was the only man who never lost time with the Limited.

H. E. HAMBLEN.

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THE DUKE AND THE MARQUISE.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

In the time of powder and patches, of silly adventure and lawsuits, the Duke de Troncantique and his noble neighbour, the Marquise of Souchevieille, were disputing hotly over the possession of a certain hazel copse.

Which of the two belligerents had the best of it? A difficult problem, truly. Perhaps the Marquise—perhaps the Duke. The misanthrope Rochefoucauld has said that a quarrel can never last long unless there is wrong on at least one side. The dispute of the Duke and Marquise kept up seven years.

While the most illegible scrawls poured in without cessation upon the two châteaux, the two owners experienced an equal uneasiness as to the issue of their suit. To be sure, the decision of the tribunal could not cause great pecuniary loss to the vanquished, but since the "amour-propre" of each was involved, the rancour of the two disputants would have been quite as great with only a pin at stake. Indeed, so carried away did both become, with the fear of losing, as well as with the hope of winning, that they finally bethought them of a compromise.

One fine day the Duke de Troncantique (feigning, out of kindness of heart, to come to terms), solicited the hand of the Marquise in marriage, and she, pretending to be overcome by such graciousness, condescended to grant his request. Thus the hazel copse was to be owned by them conjointly.

The betrothal, hastily announced, set everybody agog both far and near, who had heard of the tiresome litigation.

The gentlemen of the law turned their backs upon them in disgust.

"Poor creatures," they said apologetically, "the idea of marrying to end a quarrel! It is as senseless as the crazy man who jumped in the river for the fear of getting damp."

The families of the Duke and the Marquise shrugged their shoulders, and cried:

"A lawsuit is more expensive than one would suppose."

But the world at large applauded the arrangement, and declared it most reasonable.

"They both," remarked the Countess de Languefine, "bear aristocratic names, and own fine fortunes. Both are widowed, both are old, both are ugly, and they detest one another. What more could one demand in a matrimonial venture?"

As to the bride and groom-elect they paid small heed to the gossips, contenting themselves with deploring the exigencies of fate, and retarding as much as possible the fulfilment of their mutual promise.

The gallant lover pleaded business in the city, and his fiancée pretended to have urgent duties in the country.

For the sake of the proprieties they agreed to write to each other while thus separated.

The Duke took refuge in a suburban hotel.

Seated upon a Louis XIII. chair, and looking almost imposing, with his white hair and amaranthine coat framed by the sombre tapestries on the walls, he absent-mindedly broke the seal of a letter bearing a coat of arms, which he had just received.

Glancing at the feminine handwriting covering the pages he remarked, smiling:

"Some work for you, my nephew Cleante."

Cleante was standing in the embrasure of the leaded glass window.

His twenty years, his eyes of periwinkle blue, his blonde hair, frosted with powder, and his violet doublet quilted with lace, brightened the old room. He was as piquant and catchy as a madrigal—as young and fresh as the springtime.

He seemed to have been created for the pencil of La Tour, or the pen of Marivaux.

"How my worthy friend would turn up her aristocratic nose if she knew how I disposed of her epistolary efforts," added Monsieur de Troncantique, fanning himself with his Mechlin lace handkerchief, while Cleante took the letter of the Marchioness, and read it over carefully, in order to acquaint himself with its contents.

It was so full of vivacity and sparkle, that one felt sure the heart of Madame de Souchevieille was still young even though her face was seamed with wrinkles. She

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wrote of serious things without pedantry, and amusing ones without frivolity.

Here and there was a hint of philosophy, and occasionally one of politics. Indeed, it was charming, this letter, written scarcely a century after Mme. de Sevigne, at a period when Mme. d'Epinay, Mme. du Deffand, and so many others conversed with their pens, like Voltaire and Diderot.

Cleante read each paragraph eagerly, inhaling at the same time the fragrance of the rose-tinted paper. And what images this subtle perfume evoked—a white hand, a rebellious little curl, a lace fichu crossed modestly over a young and palpitating breast. If he had only not known to a certainty that the writer was a grey-haired woman of sixty! The young man smiled to himself.

"Is it possible that I am becoming enamoured of a person of that age?" he queried.

"Well, nephew," demanded the Duke, awakening from a short nap, "is the Marquise as loquacious as usual? If you will reply to her letters for me, in my name, you will render me a service I cannot soon forget. Would to Heaven that you could permanently fill my place there!"

At the château of Souchevieille the Marquise reclined in an easy chair, surrounded by dainty trifles, and read the New Heloïse from time to time, having recourse to her enamelled snuff-box.

A few steps from her a young girl was busy writing at a rosewood desk. She worked rapidly, punctuating the phrases with graceful movements of the head, as though admiring the delicate black characters which, without speaking, expressed so much.

She was a graceful girl of sixteen, and her lithe young figure looked even more graceful than its wont, emerging from the voluminous paniers of her brocaded gown, while the velvet about her neck, and the patch upon her chin and under her left eye appeared indescribably black against her milk-white skin.

"In the name of Heaven, Doris, my child, how do you find so much to say to the Duke?" lazily demanded the old lady.

"Ah, aunt, dear, I have not yet written half as much as he wrote to you," replied Doris, with a smile. "The Duke must indeed be passionately in love with you to pen such pretty speeches, and I believe—yes, I really believe, that you will be happy with him. Such sentiments bespeak a bright mind and noble heart."

"The heart of a bailiff, the mind of a coachman, my beauty. Ah, if you were but forty years older!"

Still smiling Doris sealed her letter, then seated herself by the window, where she dreamily watched the clouds.

She did not dream, however, that she was forty years older, but that she received letters as loving as those of her aunt, and that the Duke de Troncantique was just forty years younger than now.

Twelve months rolled by, and the day was near at hand for the consummation of the marriage, when one morning the Duke landed at the château, and earnestly requested the Marquise to meet him at the hazel copse.

The Marquise consented, but upon arriving at the rendezvous—ah, thrice accursed mischance!—the Duke was suddenly seized with an attack of gout, besides suffering agony from an old wound—glorious souvenir of Fonteroy.

"Cleante, my boy, there remains but one thing to be done," he cried. "Go yourself to the hazel copse, and be the bearer of my regrets."

The young man obediently departed on the instant, and singular to say, his heart throbbed at the suggestion of meeting her who had so filled his thoughts.

"It is time for this nonsense to end," he said, taking himself to task. "A sight of the Marquise will dispel my dreams. I know she has white hair, an ungraceful form, and am not even sure that she does not limp."

Cleante had hardly reached the hazel copse when he caught a glimpse, at the end of the road, of a sombre-hued gown.

"Ah," he whispered, "the rose-coloured paper was eighteen years old at most, but this dead leaf frock is a sexagenarian at least." However he could but avow that the delicate silhoutte outlined against the trees, was by no means bent, nor was there the least halt in the gait.

She was approaching him—nearer, yet nearer—the old lady.

Unfortunately her head was bowed, and her eyes fixed on the pebbles of the walk, so that nothing was visible save her white hair, drawn back under the hood of a dark-brown cloak. The hair, however, was certainly very white. After scrutinising the wrinkled face, the faded eyes, the weary mouth, he would smile at his folly.

But while he looked the unknown raised her head, and he saw that her eyes sparkled, her skin was smooth, her lips fresh, and that it was powder, and not age, that had whitened her blonde hair.

Shortly after the hour for the rendezvous the Marquise declared that a headache, from which she had been suffering, was better, and took the path to the hazel copse, intending to secrete herself in the forest, and witness the discomfiture of the Duke at her non-appearance.

"What will my little simpleton say to the old dotard?" she queried, thinking aloud.

Walking softly Madame de Souchevieille entered the underwood, but paused, startled, for just in front of her, moving cautiously like herself, there came the Duke. The two former adversaries stared at one another in alarm for a second, and then simultaneously turned their eyes upon the cross roads of the hazel copse.

There insects hovered about the opening flowers that perfumed the air, the sunshine filtered through green leaves, and seated near each other, hand in hand, sat Cleante and Doris, smiling into one another's eyes.

"I love you, Doris," Cleante was saying.

"And, Cleante, I love you," murmured Doris.

In the flowering hazel trees above them there was a medley of bird notes.

For a moment the Duke de Troncantique and the Marquise de Souchevieille stood as though rooted to the spot, with eyes and ears for naught else save the sweet mystery before them.

Then recalled to their own paltry affairs, they cried with one voice:

"These two children are our heirs. Why not consent to their union, settle the hazel copse upon them, and so end our long controversy?"

And they both added, "in petto," with touching unanimity:

"Thank God! my pride is appeased without the need of marrying."

G. J. Worboise.

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The Attack on the Mission.

THE sandalled footfall of the Franciscan friar, going to and fro in sun-steeped California, has sealed certain nooks of it, here and there, to an eternal quiet. Such a nook is the valley of the San Diego River. Subject to summer drought and winter overflow, it is as lonely, perhaps lonelier, to-day than when in 1775 a Spanish "presidio" guarded its entrance and a Spanish mission crowned its head. For not only the Spaniard has gone for ever, but all those Indian peoples whose strongholds were in the mountains that still rise beyond the far levels of the *mesas* like islands out of the sea's edge.

But, however softly the valley sleeps to-day, some thrilling chapters of life were lived in it during its foreign occupation. In November, 1775, eleven Spaniards shared a cruel experience at the old mission then known as the mission of San Diego de Nipaguay.

Two monks, four soldiers and three mechanics—according to strict Castilian ideas of caste—are nine of the eleven enumerated in the military annals of the time. But the pair remaining to complete the tale of souls, fall together by a simple and beautiful law of nature. They were boys.

"My son," wrote Lieutenant de Ortega, commandant of the "presidio," in his official report of the affair, "and a little fellow of ten, the son of my corporal."

Francisco was the name of the commandant's boy, and Juan was the name of the other. They had been sent up from the "presidio" to the mission that they might dwell for a time with the good *padres* and learn to serve them at the altar. Francisco was thirteen years old, and both youthful acolytes were as thorough boys as ever ached for playtime to come.

So it was on that ever-memorable fourth of November. The last intonation of the vesper services had scarcely died away in the gloomy adobe church, when they were in the sacristy scrambling out of their white gowns, and then through a door opening upon the hill slope at the back of the church. There they made a grand rush for a favourite perch, climbing upon the low mud wall of the unfurnished building.

Often before had they sat there, side by side, to watch the files of Indian converts march by, retiring for the night to their brush village above the mission, and finding a perpetual incitement to wonder in those swarthy faces still so full of the smouldering fires of savagery. But on this particular evening a matter most vital and pressing, from a boy's point of view, choked up the well-spring of curiosity and brought their heads close together in a whispered conference.

"*You* ask!" urged little Juan, his fat face twisted with anxiety.

"No; you!" insisted Francisco.

"But you are bigger," piped Juan.

"And you are smaller," scoffed Francisco.

Juan drummed hard against the wall with his heels, not screwing his courage up to face a disagreeable necessity, but busy conjuring up fresh reasons why his companion should undertake it.

It seems that the corporal of the mission guard of three cuirassiers, himself an old presidial veteran, being bound on the morrow upon a grand hunt after stolen mission cattle, had suggested to the boys, fine riders both of them, that they might go along with him and see the country. The invitation had brought with it as much anguish as delight, for there were the *padres* to reckon with.

All day long the boys had hung back from the dread ordeal of asking permission, though each was for ever edging the other on to it. Now the thing must be settled.

"Your father is commandant," said Juan, returning vigorously to the charge.

For once Francisco was silenced. With his bringing-up, military rank was everything, obligation as well as privilege.

"Besides," Juan burst out, feeling that if this did not do the business he was at the end of his resources, "you are almost sixteen."

It was adroitly done. To be almost sixteen meant to be almost a soldier, a tune to which all Francisco's dreams were set. His soft black eyes fired. He glanced indulgently down at Juan—so far off from the glories of cavalry-jacket and carbine!

"I will ask Father Jayme," he declared, "the very next minute I see him."

Juan's countenance showed a veritable sunburst of relief.

"He can only say 'no'" mused Francisco aloud, preparing himself for the worst.

"But if he should say 'yes,'" squeaked Juan ecstatically.

Francisco allowed himself to catch a measure of his small comrade's enthusiasm.

"Why then, Señor Sleepy-Head," he said patronisingly, "if you are not up bright and early, the corporal and I will be off without you."

"But you will call me, eh, Frazquato?" said Juan, with a serene faith in the integrity of friendship.

"We start up yonder," was Francisco's reply, nodding towards a gap in the brown hills opposite them as they sat, and assuming a far more intimate knowledge of the old corporal's plans than Juan possessed. "We follow the river till we come to a valley ever and ever so much bigger than this."

"A hundred times bigger, eh, Frazquato?" suggested Juan, his comfortable acquiescence enlivened by a keen statistical zest.

"A thousand times bigger!" cried Francisco, his imagination bound to exceed a mere baby's. "With rocks and rocks piled up all round it into mountains brimful of Indians."

"If a thousand of them should come after us, eh, Frazquato?" chuckled Juan.

"If ten thousand should come?" cried Francisco. "What then? We will fire off our carbines all together, and you will see them run like wild deer!"

The two boys roused to a tickling sense of their superiority to such savage terrors, looked each other in the eyes and roared with delight. A grey robe appeared round the corner of the church and their faces fell.

Father Jayme was coming to call them to bed.

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They dropped to the ground with reluctant accord, and went forward to meet him.

"Ask! ask!" gasped Juan, not forgetting the secret business in hand.

The father who encountered them was a large man with rugged features softened by a mild benignity.

But just now a keen twinkle deep in his blue eyes told that he fancied he had all but caught his two acolytes in some piece of mischief—or why had master Francisco gone so pale, and why did little Juan wear such a hangdog air?

He inquired of them shrewdly. Had they been hanging about the barracks, taking in idle soldier-songs and stories?

The question glanced so near their hearts that Juan gave up all for lost. As for Francisco, though he turned paler still, had he not resolved? Were not the very words of his request ranged in order in his head?

"Señor Padre," he began as he intended, and then stumbled over something that must be added impromptu. "We were at the barracks—but only this morning. But only to speak to the Señor Corporal, and the Señor Corporal says would you please give Juan and me your most gracious permission——"

And so, the portentous inquiry being out, the two boys can only wait with their respective hearts in their respective mouths.

Padre Jayme has taken each of them by an ear, pinching hard. Is he very, very angry? They dare not even peep to see.

"So ye are aching, you two, to get leg over horse," he begins after a pause. "'*Vaya*,' why not?" He is gazing down beamingly at them. "A holiday never does boy or *burro* any harm. Keep close to Corporal Rocha, a trusty fellow."

The listeners could have leapt for joy. What they did instead was to kiss his hand, receive his benediction, and file demurely off to bed.

"No talking," the *padre* had warned them. They obeyed with devout exactness until snug in their little cots placed against opposite walls of the refectory. Then was heard suppressed whispers, with ecstacy in every syllable.

Juan was soon sound asleep. Francisco, excited by the morrow, was much longer in losing himself.

He awoke with a great leap of the senses. He thought that the corporal had come in and was holding a lantern to his eyes to rouse him to start. But the room was silent, and all in darkness, except where a single window opening high in the thick wall showed a dim grey square. Could that be the dawn looking in? Was to-morrow to-day at last?

Francisco slipped out of bed, and climbing into the window looked eagerly through the wooden bars, expecting to see the daylight. He was disappointed. The sky was only less dark than the earth. It could not be more than midnight.

The boy was in the act of sliding to the floor, when his eye was fixed by a point of dull light appearing in the direction of the barracks. He did not have time to hope that it was the corporal's lantern after all; the red glow mounted swiftly, approaching him, then passed, hissing like a serpent, high over the roof above him.

Instantly other fiery serpents were darting in many directions. One striking downwards revealed the thatch of the smithy in a dull glare—the glare shot aloft, a puff of flame.

Flames are kindling elsewhere. A bit of hillside, the triangle formed by barracks, smithy and *padre's* house, where a boy stands dazed, bursts into a weird illumination, is alive with frantic figures, striped like the zebra, spotted like the leopard. Heads bristling with wild feathers toss one above another, higher yet, in a fierce, elastic, soundless dance, and every bound brings the whirling swarm closer and closer to the *padre's* house.

It has needed this thrilling certainty to rouse the boy there from his stupefaction.

He drops to the floor.

Juan is asleep, with round face upturned to the unearthly glow broadening through the room.

Francisco seizes the child by the shoulders, drags him sputtering and stumbling towards the cell where Father Jayme lies.

Father Jayme is drowsily sitting up in bed to wonder at the loud crackling of the roof above him.

"Indians!" gasps Francisco. "Indians! Indians!"

Father Jayme beats upon a wall, calling his companion monk by name.

"Fray Vicente! Fray Vicente!"

Little Juan, wide awake at last, is screaming at the top of his voice over and over: "Will they kill me?"

Nobody pays any heed.

Flakes of fire are falling in the refectory as the four run together there.

Somebody seizes some clothing for the boys, but there is no time to put it on. A wolfish, ear-piercing howl announces the savages at the door.

Father Jayme alone is calm; the others cling to him. He argues gently but firmly, against something that Father Vicente is eloquently urging.

"Surely if my converts are among them they will heed my voice."

A great horror falls upon the three when they see that Father Jayme is going to open the door.

What will become of him—them?

His hand on the latch, Father Jayme turns to give an order.

"Take these children to the barracks. Hold the soldiers back from violence until I come."

The door swings open. Padre Jayme steps forth into the midst of a thousand demons, leaping full in flames of mingling earth and sky, as serenely as ever in the sweet sunshine. The shock of his courage brings an instant's hush. Those within hear his voice in the customary mission greeting:

"Love God, my children!"

For only answer there is a yell of derision. Father Jayme is surrounded, whirled out of sight towards a black hollow beyond the awful glare.

Francisco, boy as he is, finds himself mechanically running with little Juan, making for the barracks. At the door Father Vicente joins them, though at first he would have followed Father Jayme. The three enter together. Alas, for that refuge!

The big room is thick with blinding smoke. Soldiers are darting about in what would be sheer panic but for a voice bellowing out orders:

"Into your '*cueras*,' every mother's son of you! Guard powder-horns as the apple of your eyes! Arm, and come this way! This way!"

Thus Father Vicente found Corporal Rocha in full preparation for flight.

"The *padre's* house?" demanded the corporal of him.

"Gone—and the church!" answered Father Vicente.

It remained to decide upon a last desperate retreat.

Not far from the barracks was that wall of an unfinished building, upon which two boys had been so glad and so tormented about the morrow that no one may

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live to see. It was a four-foot wall inclosing a square of ground used as a place for lumber, old boxes and casks, and generally known as the "*Ceradito*," the "Little Inclosure."

"To the *Ceradito!*" was the corporal's word.

He gathered his five fighting men about him, three "cuirassiers," a carpenter and a smith—one smith having been shot to death by arrows in trying to reach the barracks. At that instant the north wall of the building was already one sheet of flames. Oh, the horrible sound of it!

"Every man for himself and for the defenceless!" cried the corporal. "Keep close together. Out with you when I give the word!"

The door flew open.

"To the *Ceradito*!"

The yells drowned the roar and crackle of the fire. The open hillside was pouring a flood of savages that way. Even strong men held back. Then the wall of flame sucked towards them by the draught and drove the hapless Spaniards forth.

What a moment that was! The eight Spaniards, big and little, in a knot. Some fighters running forward, some running backward, that all might face the foe. The two children stifling in the struggle of strong-limbed men. Juan shrieking, and Padre Vicente lifting him bodily along. Arrows whizzing swiftly through the air; the roar of carbines; shouts, groans; the thick of battle; an eternity of anguish before a voice cries: "The Ceradito!" and all tumble in, two of the nine souls, soldiers both, never to rise again. But the anguish is by no means over.

So desperate was the defence to follow that the old military annalists, busy with the deeds of men, refuse to take any note of the presence of mere children. Hence history, though interesting itself in the suffering of the innocents of all ages, is forced to confess, "Nothing further is known of these two boys"—our poor Francisco and little Juan—"during the rest of this eventful night."

But the other figures stood boldly forth. The corporal called for the casks and the beams with which to barricade an opening left in the wall for a door; luckily material was plentiful.

In clearing the floor for the corporal's purpose some gunpowder was unexpectedly brought to light, fifty pounds of it in a canvas bag, thrust in there for lack of safer stowage, and forgotten. At first hailed with joy, this treasure-trove was speedily seen to be a deadly menace. For a score of Indians, leaving the attack on the barricade to their main body, rushed to seize a mound above the Spaniards and thence throw down blazing brush and tree branches upon them.

Father Vicente had been on his knees praying aloud. He rose at this moment, and seeing the danger, spread himself, a living prayer upon the powder, covering it with his robe, his breast.

But if here was one hero was there not another?

Arrow wounds in his body, his last comrade fallen, Corporal Rocha of the guard, still stood boldly up, firing as fast as two or three of the wounded could load for him, and shouting orders as if directing the volleys of a whole platoon:

"Steady, men! Aim steady! Send every bullet home! Death to the enemies of Spain!"

Gallantly his voice rings out above the din. One against a thousand is he, yet his eye remains keen, his brain brimful of determination to hold the Indians back from that rush, which would quickly end all. This is why he roars in trumpet-tones as if to direct the approach of a relief party from the "Presidio"—alas! six miles away.

"This way to the rescue! Santiago and succour! Close up, Spain! Shoot the renegades down from behind!"

While he is still hoarsely shouting, lo! the silent dawn is come, and the Indians have as silently melted away.

The besieged peer out to make sure of it. Then they turn to look upon each other. Their faces are strange each to each by reason of blood, and the havoc of fire. They are mere wrecks of men; but the corporal and the *padre*, at least, can speak, clasp hands and thank God.

Suddenly the corporal, staring about him, makes a discovery. Something as like a human creature as the rest of them, only on a lesser scale of inches, is sitting erect in a dim corner of the mud wall.

"*Santiago*!" ejaculated the corporal in a deep voice of amazement, "it 's Francisco!"

Arrows had spared the lad; not so the flames. His delicate oval face was darkly singed, his long soft, black locks were burnt away, his ten fingers were so many charred sticks.

"And Juanito!" half-blubbered the corporal, recalling that cheery, plump little rogue.

But the blackened spectre of Francisco was able to answer, and with a quick-flashing smile:

"He is here, Juanito!"

The corporal, joined now by the *padre*, stared harder, but could see nothing. Nothing, that is, except a wide-mouthed, thick-waisted water-jar lying on its side. He went over to investigate. Even the wounded craned their necks to see.

The corporal looked in the jar and laughed. He rolled it over with his foot, a frightened head was thrust out of it and instantly drawn back, and it was only under strong encouragement—the Indians were surely gone!—that there did at last emerge from that strange shelter, very reluctantly, a familiar, plump little form.

Juan was in his bedgown and had one shoe; but, except for the grime of tears on his fat cheeks, as whole and sound as if he had slept the night through in his cot, next the refectory wall.

"In there," said Francisco, explaining the situation with naive unconsciousness of self, "I could keep the fire off him."

"Juan of the water-jar!" grinned the old corporal, dubbing the child off-hand with a nickname that was to cling to him for life.

As for Francisco, least of our heroes—in years—Padre Vicente alone thought to lay a hand in silent approval upon his head, wherefore his good deed remained aware only of its own perfume and not of men's praise. Beside, for him, was there not Juan? A comradeship thus early tried was ever to endure; in saddle and out, in long years to come, Francisco and Juan were ever to remain firm friends throughout the many and varied experiences of two cavalry soldiers in a wild, savage-infested land.

But those who are able must now creep out of the "Little Inclosure," to gaze upon the mission in ruins, and the deserted Indian village above it; to search for good Father Jayme, and to find his dead body down in a hollow whence to-day some noble palm trees spring aloft, fit frame for the crumbling front of a later mission built upon the site of the mission destroyed on that November night of 1775.

T. Candler.

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THE FINAL WAR

BY

LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Shadow Hand," "An American Emperor," "The Lost Provinces," etc.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Rigour of the Game.

For two days and nights the English and American troops toiled unceasingly whilst they landed guns, stores, forage, and horses, and pushed rapidly ahead for the front at Neuminster.

What few moments of relaxation were snatched by the officers and men from the "old country" were devoted to items of gossip concerning the manner in which the Yankees "fixed up" everything in which they were deficient.

Proportionately to their numbers they were short of cavalry, and Colonel Ritchie proposed that his San Franciscans should be mounted on the German horses captured at Neuminster. General Smithson assented with equal nonchalance, and the English staff were amazed to see the change effected within a few hours. They argued, of course, complete disaster for the regiment should it come into contact with the highly-trained cavalry of the enemy, but they soon had cause to alter their opinion.

There were plenty of spare guns on board the transports and the Duke of Connaught, faithful to his promise of non-interference, did not even elevate his eyebrows when the chief of the United States staff applied for sixty 12-pounders so that he might "fix up" ten field batteries.

The American also asked that a number of non-commissioned artillery officers should be lent to him, until the men "got the hang of it," which he assumed would be the case before they would be needed in action—a statement which brought a sardonic grin to the face of the R.A. veteran whose duty it was to pick out the requisitioned instructors. Nevertheless it will suffice to say that although the United States gunners could not hope to so quickly attain the high pitch of excellence shown by the British artillery, they accomplished marvels in the shape of actual work when the next great battle was fought.

Nor had they to wait long for the much talked-of event.

When two great armies are spoiling for a fight, there is usually not any insurmountable difficulty in accommodating them. The British forces pressed on to Neuminster, and the Germans, on their part, did not let the grass grow beneath their feet in hurrying forward preparations for a strong attempt to hurl the invaders out of the Fatherland.

By a seemingly tacit understanding the British — by which term the United States' forces are quite naturally included—and the German commanders regarded Oldesloe as the ultimate theatre of operations. Although scouting by considerable detachments of cavalry and more determined reconnaissances were indulged in on both sides, there was no serious affair between the belligerents until they had massed their armies within thirty miles of each other, with Oldesloe lying midway between.

During one of these minor affrays a driver of the Army Service Corps earned immortality by a feat of remarkable endurance, which has seldom, if ever, been paralleled in the annals of war.

The company to which he belonged was convoying a quantity of stores along the left flank of the British lines of communication, when suddenly two squadrons of Prussian cavalry swept round the head of a dense clump of trees and delivered a well-timed charge, with the evident object of destroying the train.

The officer in command of the Army Service Corps detachment was young, and had never seen a fight outside the Long Valley, but he put into practice the precepts therein acquired with the ease and confidence of a veteran.

In obedience to his commands, men and horses started from the quiet jog of the march into a thunderous gallop.

Within half a minute they had formed a triangular laager, of which the waggons supplied the three external faces, the horses being safely ensconsed inside.

A sergeant spoke to him.

This is a difficult and dangerous manœuvre either in peace or war.

The waggons advance, for the most part, in echelon formation, and the slightest deviation of a vehicle will infallibly bring down the horses of its successor, possibly involving a section of a column in common ruin.

The formation was accomplished without apparent hitch, and the magazine rifles were soon busy in emptying German saddles. The incident was ended almost as soon as it had commenced. It was then noticed that the driver of one pair of horses did not rise from the

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ground, where he had fallen after getting his waggon into correct position. A sergeant spoke to him and then bent over him to hear the poor fellow say feebly:

"I can't get up, sergeant. My left leg was smashed at the knee-joint by No. 5 waggon when the row commenced."

This gallant soldier had nevertheless kept his seat and guided his team until his duty was performed to the letter. Then the anguish he was enduring conquered his iron nerve, and he collapsed.

At the close of the campaign the Duke appointed him his coachman, but the brave fellow was lame for life.

Field-Marshal Prince Albert of Prussia had been selected by the Emperor to command this second Grand Army. He led his own Westphalian Army Corps into the field, and had at his disposal nine other territorial corps, making a total force of 330,000 men, with 400 guns and 11,000 horses.

This gigantic force had been exercised together, as it happened, during the preceding autumn manœuvres, and Prince Albert was in command on that occasion. He knew his staff thoroughly, and his men had complete confidence in him, for his reputation as a general stood very high, dating back from his distinguished services as a cavalry leader in more than one section of the Franco-German War.

A thoroughly conscientious soldier, to whom fatigue or trouble were unconsidered trifles when duty was to be done, this German Prince had more of the Slav than the Teuton in his composition. Were one told that he was a Romanoff, the lofty forehead, square, stern face, and firm chin, with its heavy underlip, would not belie the story. Such a man, at the head of such troops, was a very solid fact in the way of the British advance.

To oppose him, the Duke of Connaught surveyed at Neumin-ter two fine English army corps of 70,000 men each, and slightly over 100,000 United States soldiers. This total of 240,000 was split up into twenty-four divisions, each containing four small but compact brigades. There were 250 guns of field and horse artillery, and some 12,000 cavalry, to which arm the Americans contributed 5,000.

On the night of the 16th of June, all preparations having been made for an advance in the direction of Oldesloe on the following day, the Duke of Connaught summoned a Council of War.

He briefly stated his plan of action, so far as this could be foreseen prior to actual contact with the enemy.

"From information gathered by a very daring bit of cavalry scouting carried out by the 14th Hussars," he said: "it is evident that the Germans are in greater force towards Hamburg than on the Lubeck side. The British right wing must consequently be of exceptional strength, and I will be glad if General Smithson will regard that as his special post."

General Smithson smiled with the air of a man who has a responsible but highly pleasant task intrusted to him.

"My own troops," continued the Commander-in-Chief, "will form the centre and left wing. With the exception of a small cavalry escort for the guns, which will at the outset be massed in the centre, I propose that the four cavalry brigades be equally divided for service on the flanks."

All present agreed that this arrangement would facilitate the next day's march, as the men could proceed to their allotted positions with the least expenditure of energy, an important consideration, for they were already suffering from the severe strain of the debarkation and subsequent events.

"I take it, Prince," said General Smithson, "that you have not yet made up your mind as to the programme?"

The Duke by this time knew his man fairly well, and understood, without possible reason, that the American officer had some ulterior motive in asking this apparently aimless question.

"I cannot decide definitely upon a certain course until I have learnt something of the enemy's intentions," he replied.

"Of course, of course," assented the other. "I was only figuring things out on general principles, so to speak."

"Well, and won't you tell us what you have figured out, sir," said the Duke, turning earnestly towards his colleague.

"If you think hard enough you'll take the same view."

"You see, it's just this way," was the answer, given in deliberate and convincing tones, "tired men can't fight well, nohow. We'll allow that the enemy is as dead beat as we are after we get jammed close together at the end of the day's march. Nobody will feel particularly bad if there isn't any trouble to-morrow night. Next morning both parties will want to get to business quite early, and the affair won't end in ten minutes. In this sort of country, with nothing but grass plots and bits of forest dotted about the view, there's likely to be more give-and-take fighting than in broken land, where position is half the battle. And I calculate the Germans are about three to two of us."

General Smithson paused to arrange his cigar more comfortably, and every man in the Commander-in-Chief's quarters felt that this shrewd American was about to propound some scheme as the result of his cogitations.

"Odds are odds, all the world over," he continued, "and, on paper, we ought to get a considerable licking."

An impulsive cavalry officer here broke into Smithson's slow speech.

"That is a poor spirit in which to begin," he cried, a hot flush mounting to his face.

The Duke promptly interfered. "Have the goodness to permit General Smithson to proceed. So far, I agree with every word he has uttered."

"If you think hard enough you'll take the same view," said the United States commander, pointing the stump of his cigar at the interrupter. "Now, it seems to me," he went on, "that if we can select the best possible position near Oldesloe, Prince Albert will hurry up to attack us. Two men can hold a place against three, but they cannot turn three out of their location unless they choose to quit. If we can make the Germans sweat themselves against us, our boys taking it fairly easy in between times, we might be able at the close of the game to play them up strong when they have already done all they want to do for one day."

This advice was so obviously sound that it was unanimously adopted, and the impetuous cavalryman seized the earliest opportunity to apologise for the unnecessary heat he had displayed.

"Cork up your energy," said General Smithson good-humouredly. "You'll want it before you go to sleep on the 18th."

Following the example set by Lord Roberts before the recent operations in the valley of the Seine, the Duke of Connaught issued, in the "Orders of the Day," a stirring reminder to his men of the anniversary of Waterloo.

"To-morrow," ran his words, "we will be fortified by the reflection that in facing a vastly more numerous foe we shall be only following the glorious precedent of our forefathers on another 18th of June.

"The firmness, the discipline, the calm courage which enabled the men of Waterloo to crush Napoleon's troops are hereditary qualities in the English-speaking race.

"Whether from east or west of the Atlantic, we are equally the successors of the heroes who fought under Wellington in Spain and France. I have never entered upon any solemn undertaking in the course of my life with

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such certainty as I feel upon this, the eve of our first great battle on German soil.

"Do we need deeds to emulate—they are supplied by our comrades afloat and ashore. We are fortified by the knowledge of their achievements; we are strengthened by the conviction that the guardianship of the sacred cause of our nation is as fully committed to our hands as to theirs.

The Duke rode out in front.

"I have but one instruction to add for the common guidance to-morrow. There is plenty of ammunition. Shoot often, but—above all else—shoot straight."

Both Thomas Atkins and Brother Jonathan read these utterances with much approval. These gentlemen now rejoiced in a common title, "The Busters." For a little while they were at a loss for a synonym which briefly expressed the composite elements of the army, until some pretty wit devised this word, which not only gave an elegant combination of "British" and "U.S.," but also supplied phonetic expression to their peculiar attributes in the robust vernacular of the streets.

There was a philosophic value in the phrase. It conveyed the idea of complete unity, and at once swept aside possibilities of jealousy and differentiation.

The "Busters," then, took affidavit in approved form that they would "plate" or "get the drop on" the Germans to their best powers.

The anniversary of Waterloo should certainly not want a fitting celebration.

The Commander-in-Chief was wise enough to give his men ample rest on the night of the 16th. Not until noon of the following day did the march of the infantry begin. But in the early hours the Duke and General Smithson, safeguarded from risk by a strong cavalry escort, surveyed the country near Oldesloe, selected the ground to be occupied by each division, and gave specific instructions to the staff-officers who would accompany divisional commanders to their particular stations.

On the night of the 17th the weather was fine and clear. From the absolute quiet that obtained in the vicinity of Oldesloe, one might have thought that nowhere on earth did more profound peace and restful security prevail.

The inhabitants of the little town had long since fled.

It was now occupied by the advance Guard of the German army, which was spread over a front of nearly four miles. The British front was more extended, running to fully five miles, and the men lay in the formation already described, two British and one American divisions supplying a reserve stationed a mile in rear of the centre.

Despite the apparent stillness of the allies they were individually as busy as bees. During the few hours of dusk, officers and men of the Sappers worked with feverish activity along the crest and on the slope of a marked undulation in the ground which fell away towards Oldesloe. They hammered tent pegs into the soil, tied long lines of thick cord to these, and measured, and paced, and triangulated as though their lives depended upon a nice pattern being traced upon the face of the earth.

Infantry officers attended these operations with great earnestness, and then hurried off to divide all regimental duties between half battalions.

The result was that 120,000 men slept, whilst their comrades toiled unceasingly with pick and shovel in the construction of field works and shelter trenches.

This quantity of labour skilfully adapted, and every man applying himself like a little steam-engine, can shift a good many cubic yards of earth, and when *reveillé* sounded at 4 a.m., the entire British front was guarded with two complete lines of entrenchments.

The now weary men—who had, as it transpired, already won the battle by their unflagging industry—retired to eat and sleep. Not even the tornado of lead and gunpowder that soon sprang into demoniacal life disturbed their repose for the few brief hours of rest vouchsafed to them.

Shortly after the relief had been effected firing commenced.

The German artillery tried to devote themselves to a general shelling of the allied position; but our gunners soon altered their views, and a fine duel ensued.

This was damaging enough to both sides while it lasted, but Prince Albert did not delay his infantry attack, which, as the Duke of Connaught had anticipated, assumed the most pronounced form on the right.

Three successive German Army Corps hurled themselves with splendid *élan* upon the Americans, and were driven back with a precision and loss that must have brought joy to the heart of Jomini himself, could he have witnessed the scene.

At the imminent risk of his life the Duke rode out in front of the centre to a point where he could observe the proceedings. Not one word did he speak to the small staff with him until the third German line reeled away into nothingness before the hail of bullets that beat upon them.

Then he turned his horse's head towards the English lines, observing as the charger broke into a trot:

"If we do as well, this will be the greatest battle in history."

Prince Albert had now got his huge army within striking distance. Although he was surprised and annoyed at the manner and method of the first repulse, he resolved to deliver a sledge-hammer blow at the entire British front.

Six army corps, aggregating nearly 200,000 men, advanced simultaneously across the plains and entered upon the second important phase of the struggle. They were formed in brigades of 5,000, of which one-fourth supplied the fighting-line and the remainder acted as supports and reserves.

This great movement took nearly two hours to complete itself, and when the final impact came it had a directness and power wholly unprecedented in modern warfare.

The battle was now entirely one of the rank and file. Unlike most great engagements, every man was individually and actively engaged.

Notwithstanding the vaunted smokeless qualities of the gunpowder used by the combatants, a murky haze filled the intervening space, and even large bodies of troops could only be distinguished at short distances.

The scene of carnage . . . was one huge canvas of death.

It was at this supreme moment that the British plan of action manifested its real excellence.

The artillery and machine guns had already obtained mechanical range for their different classes of projectiles, and the infantry, by resting their rifles in grooves pressed into the shelter trenches, were able to secure a reliable point-blank trajectory. Fifteen thousand Germans were killed or wounded during that awful half-hour's advance, but still

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they pressed on, indifferent to death or disablement, and only eager to vindicate their hardly-won reputation as the one invincible army of the world.

Yard by yard they doggedly struggled forward, firing with vigour and precision into the ill-distinguished lines in front, staggering oft before the gusts of lead that whistled through them, but still grimly resolved to achieve their object or die in the attempt.

At the precise moment when it seemed that they would succeed, when already this living torrent was about to fill up the British dykes and swamp the whole line in inextinguishable disorder and, perhaps, disaster, two cavalry brigades swept round the flanks at a headlong gallop, whilst the rest of the British horsemen, hastily recalled to right and left of the centre, poured through chaussées left for such a movement across the entrenchments, and struck the disintegrated masses of German troops as lightning darts through a thunder-cloud.

Scattering in small detachments along the entire front, they whirled through the enemy's ranks with appalling effect. For a moment the advancing swarms quivered in the struggle against the shock, and then melted away with the mist that rapidly dissipated owing to the cessation of firing.

When the dust and smoke had cleared somewhat, and the half-frenzied troopers were trotting back to the British lines in twos and threes, the scene of carnage along the five miles of front, for over a mile in depth, was one huge canvas of death.

"Which hand will you have?"

It was pitiable, heart-sickening, more awesome than a plague-stricken city. It moved the victors to compassion, and the vanquished to unalleviated agony. They were most content who laid there, motionless and silent, for even the wounded were yet paralysed with the shock given to the frame by the modern projectile.

Prince Albert of Prussia now knew that he was beaten.

Nevertheless, with the icy coolness of despair, he determined to grasp fate by the throat.

If he could not succeed, it was at least possible to strike such a blow as would render it a question of weeks of delay before the British would be able to advance further into the interior.

The Duke of Connaught, who had grown ten years older during the last hour, anxiously noted some significant changes in the enemy's formation.

Guns and cavalry were being massed in the centre, and infantry were hurrying off towards the flanks.

The Duke was now called upon to solve a momentous problem, and he did so with the acumen and directness of a born leader of men.

He dispatched gallopers to warn General Smithson on the right, and Sir Richard Sheridan on the left, to expect simultaneous flanking movements by infantry, whilst he summoned all the cavalry and guns to assemble in rear of centre with the utmost possible dispatch. By this time, too, the second half of the British army was in the trenches, and the men who ought to have been relieved felt mutinous when ordered to retire. So they were left alone.

Not one moment too soon had the Duke made his new arrangements.

Precisely at eleven o'clock the Prussian Commander-in-Chief launched his final blow.

Under cover of a continuous artillery fire, 15,000 German cavalry, led by the Field Marshal in person—for the secret desire of the Emperor was strong within his own breast—trotted towards the British centre with the intention of repeating Von Bredow's Death Ride at Mars la Tour.

If this avalanche of men and horses could ride through those lines as their predecessors dashed through the French on that memorable day, they might double up the British front, and render successful the progressing flank attacks.

If they gained their object they committed both parties to indescribable slaughter; if they failed, it meant annihilation.

Breaking into a gallop at a distance of 1,000 yards from the British, and heedless of the shrapnel now plunging through their ranks, the German cavalry swept splendidly forward.

They had barely traversed a quarter of the distance when the English and American cavalry brigades appeared on the slight crest of the infantry position, formed in line of columns with quiet rapidity, and Major-General Luck, the divisional leader, placed himself at their head, twenty paces in front of the centre regiment, the 2nd Life Guards.

The right of the line was taken by Colonel Ritchie's followers, who had been christened, no one knew why, the "Sacrament Horse."

No orders were given, for amidst the din they would have been inaudible.

Urging his charger into a canter, General Luck raised his sabre high above his head, and looked back, to the right and left along the line.

A great cheer broke forth, not alone from the troopers but from every living man on the ridge, and the great charge commenced.

As the opposing bodies of cavalry neared each other, the sounds of conflict died away, and the thunder of the horses' feet upon the hard ground grew momentarily in volume.

When they were but a hundred yards apart, a member of the Duke of Connaught's staff yelled hysterically: "Great heavens, the Americans have not drawn their swords!"

They had, but the weapons were dangling by the sword knots from their wrists, and in each man's hands were a couple of revolvers, which he discharged point blank at the German cavalry in front ere the final crash came.

The effect was stupendous. Men and horses fell, the leading squadrons came to grief before they could strike a blow, and in the *mêlée* which ensued, not a sabre was called into use until each American horseman had emptied the twelve chambers of his weapons into the mass of his opponents.

The result of this decided novelty in an affair of cavalry was soon seen. The three Uhlan regiments which met the soldiers of the United States were beaten immediately.

So rapid and decisive was their discomforture that Colonel Ritchie, who acted as brigadier of the right wing, was able to wheel his men and take the rest of the Germans in flank.

It is no discredit to the English horsemen to say that they did not find their task quite so easy. Lance met lance and sword clashed against sword, and for fully ten minutes the fight was the hardest any man present had experienced.

Locked as they were in the throes of a deadly struggle, for a little while they seemed to be a mere rabble. But at last the Prussians wavered and fell back At this moment came the diversion of the American attack on the enemy's left flank, and almost before the watching army had realised what had happened the Duke of Connaught gave orders for a general advance from the centre.

Smithson and Sheridan seized the same opportunity to rush at the deploying German infantry, and when the sun sank to rest in the west, Prince Albert of Prussia was lying in the British field hospital, and his magnificent army was non-existent.

The loss of the British forces was terrible enough, even under the circumstances of this glorious victory, whilst General Smithson said ruefully: "If we have a few more

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battles on this basis the United States will be broke with paying pensions."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Women of England.

"Which hand will you have?"

It was thus that Irene addressed her friend Ethel, looking very saucy and mischievous the while, and holding both her hands behind her back.

"What do you mean, Irene?" asked Ethel quickly, turning white. Her little frame trembled as she caught the merry gleam in her friend's eyes, and a great wild hope thrilled her that perhaps—perhaps——

"Do not tease me, dear," she said with a quivering voice, and a suspicion of tears, "if it is something very, *very* important."

"You darling," whispered Irene, melted by the appeal, as she put her arm round Ethel's waist, and gave her a warm, impulsive kiss. "You have guessed it—I am so glad; for it's only your second!"

And with this she gave Ethel a letter, with queer stamps and strange marks upon it, and wearing a travel-stained and woebegone appearance.

Ethel's hand trembled as she took it, and she gazed with longing and tenderness upon the bold clear penmanship she knew and loved so well.

"From Simla!" exclaimed her friend. "What a wonderful thing—and, oh, what a funny system they have! It's numbered 114—whatever do they put that for?"

Ethel blushed as she answered with a nervous laugh:

"It isn't *they*, dear," she said; "it's *he*."

This vague explanation seemed clear enough to Irene, who made no attempt to disentangle these ambiguous pronouns.

"But what does it mean?" she asked.

"It's a little invention of Frank's," explained Ethel confidentially. "It means this is the 114th letter he has written me. We always put the number on the envelope, so that if any of our letters go astray we shall know at once. That little note I had from Malta was 113, so that I am certain Frank hasn't sent any in between that have gone astray."

"Dear me," said Irene, looking deeply interested, "what a clever notion! I had no idea Frank was half so practical. I must really make Teddy do it. You know, dear, men are sometimes lax; it would keep them up to the mark amazingly. I should like to see Teddy dare to send me No. 200 in answer to my 280!"

"And you always know how many letters you really have had!" added Ethel.

"H'm! rather awkward, won't it be, when it gets into the first ten thousand?"

Ethel looked archly into her friend's face, and smiled.

"You goose!" she said slyly; "long before we get to that, there won't be need of any numbering!"

At which profound but obscure remark Irene beamed with comprehension, and gave Ethel a sudden hug that nearly imperilled her balance.

"But I won't delay you, darling," she went on, with motherly consideration; "I will finish my nocturne whilst you examine your treasure."

And as the sweet strains of Chopin's exquisite nocturne in G floated through the room, Ethel opened her precious missive and, with beating heart and deep thankfulness, read and re-read her lover's message.

"Oh, Irene," she exclaimed, when she had thoroughly devoured its contents, "I don't know *when* I shall get another. Frank is attached to the Indian army that is invading Russia. He's second in command of the Naval Brigade."

"Is he, dear?" cried Irene joyfully. "You have cause to be proud, Ethel. He is being promoted as rapidly as my Teddy!"

"Our Teddy, you mean!" interjected Ethel mischievously. "But this departure takes him such a long way off, and you can't expect to find post offices available in Siberia. But never mind, we must both be brave. I know that Frank will take as much care of himself as an honourable soldier may, and if anything should happen——"

"Don't, don't," exclaimed Irene hurriedly. "We can at least be worthy of our soldier sweethearts. We must be brave and hope. Honour before love even, is it not? Even if my heart were broken, I should not grudge it for my country—would you, dear?"

The two girls were very silent for a few moments, and Irene, kneeling down by the side of her friend, pressed her hand in quiet sympathy.

"What does he say?" she asked, after a pause which seemed to both like a solemn prayer.

"He tells me he is just starting for the front, and that there is a long march before him; he expects that the army will find trouble in Afghanistan. But he is confident that they will force their way to the Caspian. He believes they will fight their passage through to Moscow, and then he—no, that's all; the rest is quite unimportant."

Irene smiled, and her friend's blush did not escape her.

"A good deal of Teddy's letters are unimportant, too," she said archly. "And, between you and me, don't you like those bits best?"

All Ethel's reply was to snatch up her letter and put it away in some secret lodgment in her dress. Then she turned upon Irene with a look of mock severity.

Lady Irene Vyne and Miss Ethel Harington were amongst them.

"It's really very frivolous of you, my lady," she said, "to be wasting your time in idle jests when we have so much work before us. Has it escaped you that we have each of us to organise our corps of nurses before the end of the week?"

Irene at once looked serious. A few days previously both of the girls had attended a meeting at Marlborough House, summoned by the Princess of Wales. For there was need now of the women of England. In the wake of battle and bloodshed they were wanted to tread with beneficent step, for already the wounded among the English troops had taxed to its utmost the resources of the ambulance corps. The first to realise this, and to plan a scheme of assistance, was the gracious Princess herself, who, after a long interview with Lord Wolseley, had invited the leading ladies of London society to meet her and help her to develop it and carry it into execution.

The Princess quickly found that there were as stout hearts and willing amongst the women of England as amongst the men. She briefly described the sufferings of our soldiers, and the kind of assistance that was needed. Before the meeting was over, nearly every lady of rank present had promised to organise and equip a corps of nurses for transport to and to France and Germany. It was further decided that two trained hospital nurses should accompany each corps.

But this was not all. It was felt that every woman in England, who could afford her time or her money, should be allowed to share the satisfaction of this patriotic work. There was need of money, of lint, of bandages, of appliances—for these requirements had grown beyond the power of the Army Aid Society started by the *Times*—and the deft fingers of wife and maid alike would find unlimited occupation.

The appeal that was made was taken up with enthusiasm, and in a few days the ambulance question was settled on a scale so magnificent that even the War Office was compelled to admiration.

"But, Ethel, dear," said Irene, when they had discussed

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it fully, "do you know, I have been thinking that for some of us—the younger of us, I mean—those of us who are strong and healthy, it is not enough to send others. Ethel, is it not my place out there, too?" And she looked wistfully at her friend.

Lord Salisbury occupied the chair.

Ethel crept closer to her.

"*Your* place? And isn't it *mine* too?" she asked softly.

"But I, that is you—I mean in France, darling?" Irene stammered.

"I cannot go to Siberia, if that's what you mean," and Ethel laughed gaily. "But if you go, I go also. We are both promised brides of soldiers—of gallant soldiers, Irene—of men who do their duty bravely, and do not shrink from danger even if their lives are at stake. Cannot *we* do something also?

"I have felt this inactivity a burden, I want to be up and doing. I think I could bear it better if I knew I was not sitting here in safety and luxury, but was sharing the difficulties, if not the dangers also. Irene, dear, let us both go—you and I. It will be something, will it not?"

Irene kissed her friend with a feverish joy. It was her heart's desire.

And when the first contingent of nurses sailed from Southampton, Lady Irene Vyne and Miss Ethel Harington were amongst them.

* * * * *

A few days previous to this, and prior to the landing of the Duke of Connaught in Germany, an important meeting of the Council of National Safety was held at the Foreign Office. Not a single member was absent, and the deliberations were very solemn.

Lord Salisbury occupied the chair, and near him were the Prince of Wales, Lord Rosebery, Sir William Harcourt, Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Balfour, and Lord Wolseley.

Recent events had caused, not public elation, but a more buoyant spirit, a more assured confidence. But the leaders of the nation were grave, and gravest amongst them all was the Commander-in-Chief.

"Our difficulties become at least less overwhelming," Mr. Chamberlain had observed. "Each day has to some extent relieved the situation."

Mr. Balfour shook his head. "The most serious dangers find the stubbornest resistance," he observed reflectingly. "There is a time of heat, of exasperation, of recklessness. But when the most menacing obstacles are swept away, there comes the time when men need qualities that are rare—endurance, persistence, wearisome application to monotonous effort. In my own opinion, we have reached the supreme crisis of the war."

"And the moment," added Lord Rosebery, "when fortunately our best qualities will be called into play. For surely if English soldiers have an acknowledged virtue it is their stubbornness, their calm persistence, and their fertility of resource."

"Let us hope, Mr. Balfour," said the Prince, "that your fears may only prove a matter of philosophic doubt!"

A smile flitted round the Council.

"We are in this position," interposed Lord Salisbury. "Our army in Central Asia will keep Russia occupied. Sir Evelyn Wood is master in his defences, and when the Duke has seized the Kiel Canal, Germany will be unable to make any progress. We have inflicted severe defeats upon France. Locked as the situation is elsewhere, we have to turn our attention mainly to the last-named country. Retaliation must come sharply and vehemently. What are we to do to assist Lord Roberts? It is likely, in fact, that the great struggle of the war will be confined to France. We must concentrate our forces there."

All eyes were turned to Lord Wolseley.

"I am in agreement with Lord Salisbury," he said. "We cannot do all we should like. But whilst the Duke of Connaught and Sir Evelyn may be safely left to hold their own, there is grave peril in France. We have defeated two army corps, but the strongest of all remains—I mean that stationed at Chalons. It has long been mustered there for possible service with Germany, but it will assuredly be summoned to meet Lord Roberts. Our chief necessity, therefore, is to create a diversion, to make some new and counter attack which shall leave Lord Roberts to establish and confirm the advantage he has obtained."

Sir William Harcourt, who had been listening attentively, here struck in.

"A very curious coincidence," he exclaimed. "In one of my spare hours yesterday I amused myself with translating a portion of Homer into rough hexameters. It was the ninth book, when——" and he turned to Mr. Balfour, "you will remember that a similar situation occurs—but," stopping short with a smile, "you will tell me with justice that this will better serve the purposes of a magazine article. I presume, Lord Wolseley, that you propose to land a second army corps in France, and, I should guess, in the south?"

"That is so," answered the Commander-in-Chief a little surprised. "With the addition from Canada and other colonies, together with our new levies, it will not be difficult to land an army of 250,000 men at Marseilles or some such port. If we occupy southern France the Chalons army will necessarily be compelled to march to meet us to protect Lyons. We shall then relieve our forces in the north. It is highly important that we should do this without delay, and that we should be prepared to make a most successful and protracted stand. Indeed, upon the complete success of our operations in the south will largely, I may say entirely, depend the fulfilment of Lord Robert's plan of campaign in the north."

Lord Wolseley here produced a map of the south coast of France, and also a schedule detailing the strength of this new and formidable force he proposed to hurl upon it. For some time a close and eager discussion was maintained.

Then Lord Salisbury observed:

"It is a move of the utmost importance, and needing the finest generalship. Whom do you propose to place at the head of our Mediterranean Army Corps?"

And he looked at the Commander-in-Chief.

Lord Wolseley coloured slightly.

He yearned like a true soldier for actual service on the field of war. His position had kept him at Whitehall, where his extraordinary powers of organisation and his complete grasp of the minutest details had contributed more than the efforts of any other man to the success of English arms abroad. His was the controlling brain, the executive intellect. His foresight, his counsel, his elaborate plans for attack and defence, his unrivalled genius for commissariat, had given a unanimity, a solidity, a sureness to the British tactics, which largely accounted for their success. But he was still a soldier, and might he not now taste some of the active dangers and responsibilities of the field of battle?

Such thoughts had passed through his mind. So, in reply to Lord Salisbury's challenge, he said:

"Gentlemen, this new development in our system of attack is of the gravest and most responsible character. I have remained long in London, and done all that was open to me to expedite our affairs abroad. I think that now it devolves upon me to take upon myself more active duties still. I ask you that I may myself take command of the Mediterranean Army Corps."

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At these words a dead silence fell upon the Council, and despite the expressionless stolidity which comes of diplomatic training, a look of blank dismay settled for a moment upon every face.

There was not one present who did not know that the whole success of the war depended to a large extent upon the skill and resource of Lord Wolseley at the centre of operations—upon his clear, calm, swift decision exercised in his office in Pall Mall, where he sat at the converging point of all the many complex threads of this involved and intricate struggle. To dispatch him for service abroad was nothing less than to dispense with the brain and nervous centre of the whole British army. Yet they sympathised with the yearning of a born soldier to taste the stimulating joy of actual warfare, and they realised how the Commander-in-Chief's heart must have been from the first in the midst of the troops he loved so well.

But to gratify this desire was impossible. And yet how could it be refused with tact and kindliness?

There was a breath of relief when Sir William Harcourt jumped into the breach at this critical moment. He appreciated the difficulties of the situation, and his subtle mind, accustomed to delicate positions, rejoiced at this new opportunity for wily statesmanship.

"My lord," he said gravely, "what you have said is doubtless of the utmost gravity, and I am sure that a suggestion half wins our consent if made by you. We are prepared to carry into execution any design which your wisdom and experience clearly tell you to be essential for the success of our cause. You are aware that, so far as practical warfare is concerned, we are entirely in your hands. It is your vastly responsible duty to consider any situation that may arise, and, after coming to a mature conviction, to place us in possession of it. We are dependent upon you. I, for one, will be the first to propose that you are placed in command, if you will, remembering the national trust reposed in us, assure us that, from a military point of view, it is absolutely the best and wisest course."

Lord Wolseley sighed inwardly. He realised he was doomed to remain. The Council had shirked the responsibility. They had asked him, as a soldier, and depending upon his impartiality, to settle his own fate. Under such conditions there was but one course open to him.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "since that is the light in in which you regard it, I have no alternative. I can now spare General Sir Redvers Buller—the honour must fall to him."

The Council sought discreetly to conceal its satisfaction; but there was an audible movement of relief. And General Sir Redvers Buller, V.C., was duly appointed.

"And yet," grumbled Lord Wolseley to himself afterwards with a quizzical expression of face, as he saw Sir William Harcourt depart, innocence upon his cheeks and a guileless smile upon his lips—"and yet I supported the short service system!"

And he made some trite observations upon the luck of some men as he wrote a brief despatch to Sir Redvers Buller, telling him of his good fortune.

(To be continued.)

Uncomplimentary.—Friend (over the wine after dinner): "Your wife is certainly a brilliantly handsome woman. I shou'd think you would be jealous of her."

Host (confidentially): "To tell you the truth, Robbins, I am. I never invite anybody here that a sane woman could possibly take the least fancy to."

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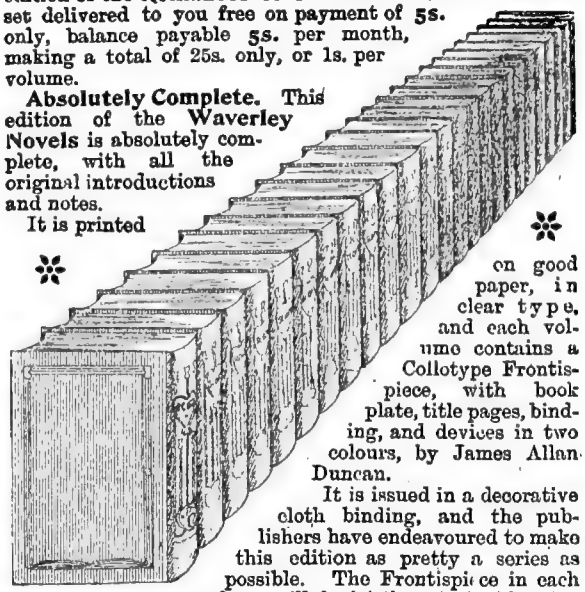

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THE PRINCE'S WOOING.

"But, your Highness," I interposed, raising my hands in consternation, "there will be war if you do not marry the Princess Clothilda. And besides, it was your venerated father's wish that you should wed her."

"Am I heir to all my father's whims and fancies?" exclaimed Prince Amagon, bringing his dainty foot emphatically down on the floor. "Shall I marry a woman whom I have never yet seen, who has never yet seen me, who may be ugly, who——"

"But, your Highness," I again suggested mildly, "the Princess is said to be very beautiful."

"Beautiful indeed!" he cried mockingly. "Why, all princesses are beautiful. There was our sister of Cleves, who of all women was the most ill-favoured. Yet even she was said to be beautiful. Else how would our poor brother of England—poor Henry—ever have been brought to marry her? This Clothilde, likely enough, is just such another ugly, fat person

'With a cast in her eye
And her mouth all awry,'

as the old rhyme goes. But even if she were beautiful as the day and brilliant as the sun, I would not wed her. For when I marry I shall take me a wife of my own choice."

"But what shall I tell the Princess, since she is already in the Palace?" I asked helplessly.

"Oh, tell her anything—anything to get rid of her," he answered carelessly, as if getting rid of the Princess were the simplest matter in the world.

"But wait," he added, as I was about to go; "there is still something else I wish to tell you. Now, I know," he began thoughtfully, flicking the flies with his riding-whip, "it is time for me to get married. I owe it to my people and my realm. But I shall choose a wife who suits me, whom I love and who loves me for myself as well as for my possessions.

"Therefore, I have determined to disguise myself as a common working man and go among my people in search of such a woman. I shall set out to-morrow morning, and you shall accompany me. So, after having performed my commands as regards the Princess, also assume the garb of a labouring man and meet me in the market-place by the fountain. You will know me by a green patch upon my sleeve. That is all. You may now go."

The final words were accompanied by a significant sweep of his arm towards the door.

There was nothing more to be said. Bowing and scraping, I backed out of the audience chamber.

However, I had no intention of letting the Prince have his own foolish, sentimental way. It is true, 'tis said, that a stubborn beast must take his own path. But in this case the mule—may I be pardoned my irreverence!—was dragging along with himself to destruction two kingdoms with their several hundred thousand inhabitants, besides bringing ruin to myself, his humble Prime Minister—which latter fact, you may be sure, was by far the most important to me.

Therefore, as I proceeded to the Princess Clothilde's apartments, I pondered in my mind how I could bring about the marriage of the Prince and Princess, and at last I hit upon a plan by means of which, I congratulated myself, this much-to-be-desired event could be accomplished.

Finally, after hurrying through the winding passages of the Palace, I reached the Princess' antechamber, whence, upon mentioning my business, I was immediately ushered by a rosy-cheeked-laughing little maid of honour into the audience chamber itself.

As I entered, a tall, Venus-like young woman, presumably the Princess, came towards me with an eager, radiant smile.

"You come from the Prince, do you not?" she asked.

I bowed a funeral bow, and said in a most tragic tone:

"I do indeed come from the Prince. But would that I did not, for the message that I bear from him is but a sorry one. Your Highness," I continued, "the Prince has been seized by a sudden madness. In spite of all I can say or do, he insists that he will not marry you. Nay, he will not even see your Highness nor hear your name mentioned."

As I spoke the Princess drew herself up haughtily, and her face lost all its sunshine.

Her mouth, tight shut, looked as if it had been chiselled in marble, and her laughing blue eyes were turned to cold-flashing steel.

I paused.

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"Well," she sneered, tapping the floor impatiently with her foot.

"Well," I answered mournfully, spreading out the palms of my hands, "if you do not marry the Prince your royal father will undoubtedly make war upon Andalusia."

"And do you think that I shall make overtures to the Prince?" she asked scornfully.

"No," I answered rapidly, "I do not. On the contrary, if you follow my advice, you will first avenge yourself upon him and then marry him."

At this point the Princess' face relaxed somewhat and she showed signs of curiosity.

"To-morrow," I continued, "the Prince in his madness is going to disguise himself as a working-man, and go out into the city to find a wife for himself. Now, not many streets distant from the Palace there is a tavern called the 'Black Boar,' the proprieter of which is a very good friend of mine, since in my youthful days I frequented his tavern, and once in later life was of slight service to him when charged with some trifling offence. If your Highness were to disguise yourself as a barmaid and come to this tavern to-morrow morning, I would take the Prince thither, also; and then it would be an easy task for you to bring the Prince, who is young and inexperienced in matters of beauty and love, vanquished to your feet. Thus would you obtain your revenge and at the same time prevent a terrible war."

"But——" faltered the Princess.

"And," I urged, "he said such shameful things about you. He said that you were as ugly and fat as—as—and he sang a ribald rhyme—which I blush to repeat—

'She's a cast in her eye,
And her mouth's all awry,'

about you."

"Well, perhaps——" She hesitated. "But are you sure the tavern is safe?"

"Your Highness," I answered, "the tavern is wholly at your service. You may bring your own retinue."

"And how shall I know the Prince?"

"He will have a green patch on his sleeve."

"Then," she said, resuming all her former haughtiness of demeanour. "I shall consider your proposition. To prevent a war I may do as you desire. You may now go."

But before I reached the door she called me back, and, bending down, anxiously asked:

"Did he really say those horrid things about me?"

I bowed.

"You may go," she said, drawing herself up frigidly.

At about ten o'clock the next morning the Prince was kneeling at the feet of the Princess Clothilde in the little side chamber of the "Black Boar." By what means the Princess had brought him to this position I cannot say, for I had been sitting in the large guest-chamber while she was practising her arts upon the Prince in the room next door.

But just now, tired of awaiting further developments, I had, so to speak, taken matters into my own hands and was peering through the doorway.

That is how I knew the Prince was on his knees.

Evidently, the Princess had not revealed herself, for the Prince with outstretched hands and upturned face, was crying passionately, "Grisette, Grisette, I love you."

The Princess flung back her head and laughed a shrill, mocking laugh.

"Why, who would ever marry such a ragged vagabond? My Karl is a thousand times as pretty a fellow as you."

"And who is this Karl?" eagerly demanded the Prince.

"Oh!" she said, "he is a master carpenter, and only twenty-three years of age. And when he comes of a Sunday to take me to church he wears a fine new silken doublet and a long feather in his cap. You," she said contemptuously, "look like my old grandmother's patch-quilt with that great green patch on your sleeve."

"But," pleaded the Prince ardently, "if it is honour and wealth and fine clothes you desire, I can give you more than anyone else in the country. If you will marry me you will have your own coach and four, and your own maids to wait upon you."

"Oh! indeed," said the Princess, "I'll be glad if you do not run off without paying the reckoning. Why, to hear you, anyone would think you were the Prince himself!"

"And I am the Prince; I tell you I am Prince Amagon himself," said he proudly.

Again the Princess' mocking laughter rang through the room.

"That is a good joke," she cried. "Your Highness indeed!" and she swept him a mocking courtesy. "Why, if you be the Prince Amagon, I am the Princess Clothilde."

"But Stein, my Prime Minister, is here, and he will bear witness that I speak the truth," persisted the Prince.

"And Stein will bear witness that I, too, speak the truth," mocked the Princess.

"Stein!" called the Prince.

Being near the door, I did not take a long time answering his summons.

I was in the room in an instant.

As I entered the Prince caught me by the sleeve.

"Am I not the Prince Amagon?" he demanded. "Do I not speak the truth?"

"Your Highness does, indeed, speak the truth," I answered, bowing gravely.

"And I," the Princess cried, clutching me with mock eagerness by the sleeve "am I not the Princess Clothilde? Do I not speak the truth?"

"Your Royal Highness also speaks the truth," I repeated, with a bow for her.

The Prince stared.

Suddenly the Princess broke out singing shrilly:

"I've a cast in my eye,
And my mouth's all awry."

Then the Prince understood, and he did the wisest thing that could be done under the circumstances. He said nothing; made no excuses or protestations; but silently he drew her, laughing, blushing and half resisting, to his breast.

L. Digby.

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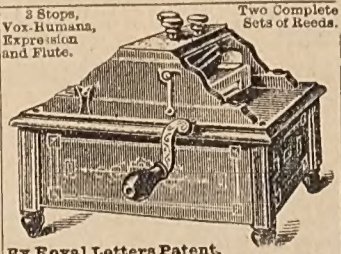

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MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THIS PAGE.

C. V. thinks that more coffee is drunk in France than in any other country; a friend disputes this, so C. V. comes to me to settle the question.——According to statistics published some time ago, it appears that the people of the United States consume more coffee than all the inhabitants of Europe. The annual consumption is set down at 318,170 tons for the U.S., 136,300 tons for Germany, 77,300 tons for France, and only 12,500 tons for Great Britain, where tea is more in favour.

Old.—It was Dickens who described a bank-note as a curl-paper from the locks of the ever-beautiful old lady of Threadneedle Street. Cobbett dubbed the Directorate of the Bank "the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street" because the Directors were apparently trying to stem the tide of national progress like Mrs. Partington and the Atlantic.

Sword.—A linesman's sword costs five guineas; a cavalry sword costs £7 10s. The latter, which measures thirty-four and a half inches and weighs two pounds nine ounces, is not regarded as a perfect weapon, for the reason that it is intended both for cutting and thrusting, and a weapon suitable for both purposes and yet "perfect" from an expert's point of view, has not been devised yet.

G. M.—Meat "wastes" less in boiling than in roasting and baking. Waste is due to the evaporation of water, the melting and escape of fat, and the exudation of nutritious juice in the form of gravy.

Flora.—The Arctic region is more extensive than you appear to imagine when you say that it is impossible for flowers to grow within it. The border of that frigid zone is not so very far away from us. Flowers are scarce towards the Pole, but within the limits of the Arctic region there are 162 varieties, all of them being white or yellow.

Leo is interested in the lion's mane. "Why does it have such a thick, cumbrous mane?" he asks. "It seems that it would be in the way."——The explanation given by some naturalists is that it is to protect the muscles of the neck and head in a fight. Those muscles are of great strength, and it is important that they should be protected, and that part of the body is always the first to be attacked by a foe of its own kind. Moreover, the mane protects the muscles from changes of temperature, so that they do not stiffen from cold or become relaxed through heat.

L. T. H.—The largest history ever published is "The History of the Rebellion," issued by the United States Government. It consists of 120 large octavo volumes of one thousand pages each.

Broker.—The first establishment of a pawnbroker's was made in Freisingen, Bavaria, just seven hundred years ago. In 1350 one was opened in Salins, France, and another in London eleven years later. None of these was successful. The Paris Mont de Piété was established in the year 1777 in the very street in which the head office now stands.

T. W.—All watches are compasses. Point the hour hand to the sun, and the south is exactly half way between the hour and the figure XII. on the dial. For instance, suppose it is four o'clock. Point the hand indicating four to the sun, and II on the watch is exactly south. Suppose again that it is eight o'clock. Point the hand indicating eight to the sun, and the figure X on the dial is due south.

T. L., who is himself country-bred and has only been in London a few months, says he has been struck by the number of "country-men" in the metropolis, and asks me to tell him what proportion of the inhabitants of London are "from the country."——According to the last census, rather more than one-third.

Needle.—Sewing machines driven by electric motors are used in a large costume establishment in Paris. The current is obtained from the street mains. I know of no such machines in London.

Alfred J. T.—New Zealand has set apart two islands for the preservation of its remarkable wild animals and other animals; thereon all hunting and trapping are forbidden.

M.—The Grand Ducal house of Mecklenburg is the oldest sovereign house in Europe. The princes claim descent from Genseric, the leader of the Vandals, and there is not much doubt about the claim. To this day the princes of the house, in their full style, call themselves "Princes of the Vandals."

Star.—The "Lone Star State" is Texas, its banner bearing one star. It is said to have the following origin. The first Governor of Texas had to send a dispatch to New Orleans; on concluding the dispatch, he found he had no seal, so he cut a five-pointed brass button from his coat and used that for the purpose. The authorities at New Orleans thought that it was intended as a representation of the State; hence the name.

Tippler.—The spoon in your glass filled with hot whisky and water prevents the breaking of the glass, because the metal readily absorbs a large part of the heat of the water.

T. L. S.—The little canals which permeate the dentine of the teeth are only 1-12,000 of an inch in diameter.

Mabel.—(1) The law of Denmark gives to every Danish subject, man or woman, the right to a pension at sixty years of age, except in cases of convicted criminals, of those who have fraudulently made over their property to relatives, of those who have brought themselves to distress by extravagance, or who have during the preceding ten years received relief from the parish, or who have been convicted of mendicity. (2) *Home Cookery* ought to suit you for the purpose you mention. It costs a penny on the first of every month.

Bumptious.—London pays 42 per cent. of the income-tax of England and Wales, and its government and management cost about £11,000,000 a year.

H. T. P.—I should think the Chinese burglar. He takes an ingredient of his own, burns it, and blows the smoke through the keyhole of the bedroom where the master of the house is asleep. The fumes dull the senses of the victim just enough to make him helpless, while at the same time permitting him to see and hear everything that goes on in the room. The only antidote against this charm is pure water, and most of the wealthy Chinese folk sleep with a basin of this near their heads.

Arthur.—In Italy thirty persons out of 10,000 die by the assassin's knife.

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WINNERS in the FIRST 'HOMELAND' COMPETITION.

For full report of this unique contest see the November issue of "Homeland." The following is a selection from the list of winners who each received a cash prize of £5 in our first contest:

Mrs. Beck, Estate Office, Sandringham, Norfolk. William Pedrick, The Deanery, Canterbury. Frederick Hill, 21 Barrington Street, Limerick, Ireland. E. Kaye, 8 Harley Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire. W. S. Mitchell, 95 Britannia Terrace, Elland, Yorkshire. Geo. W. Norman, Oak Villa, Huntly Grove, Peterborough. Margaret Hay Bell, The Red Lion Hotel, Horncastle. Mrs. S. Smith, 20 Hornby Terrace, Morecambe. Andrew A. Campbell, 18 Battlefield Avenue, Langside, Glasgow. Mrs. M. E. Light, 6 New Road, Chippenham, Wiltshire. Rachael Alice Gankroger, 338 Rochdale Road, Todmorden. Mrs. S. Woodley, 13 Caledonia Place, Clifton, Bristol. Benjamin Varley, 9 Reginald Street, Derby. William C. Harrison, 5 St. Kilda Street, Kirkdale, Liverpool. Mrs. E. M. Maskelyne, 1 Home Villas, Western Road, Romford. Miss Eliza J. Scarle, 181 Dereham Road, Norwich, Norfolk. S. Shipp, 104 Palmerston Road, Woodstone, Peterborough. Charles Wright, Goulceby, near Louth, Lincolnshire. David H. Steele, Huntly Terrace, Kelvinside, Glasgow. J. G. Mascall, Silver Street, Stansted, Essex. William C. King, 12 Grafton Street, Ashton-under-Lyne. C. Hill, 4 North Terrace, Grantham. Mr. W. Roberts, 31 Victoria Street, Clifton, Bristol. Miss May Randall, 6 Westbourne Villas, Faraday Road, Acton, London, W. Mr. R. Fisher, Red House, Waddingworth, Lincoln. Miss M. Stuart, The Grange, Farnborough, Hants. J. Seaman, 54a Downsell Road, New Town, Stratford. Sergeant-Major W. J. Elliott, R.A., Doon Villa, Princes Road, Freshwater, Isle of Wight. Mrs. John Whiteside, 44 Ramilies Road, Smithdown Road, Liverpool, and many others.

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Encouraged by the great interest which has been shown in our first competition, we have decided to hold another one, which we expect will prove even more attractive. During the long evenings of the present season, the attempt to solve the following Magic Square Puzzle will form a pleasant pastime, and we feel sure will be the means of introducing *Homeland* to numerous firesides where at present it is unknown. *For correct solutions we shall give £5 in cash.* Full particulars of the prize awards will be published in *Homeland*.

4	8	2
3	5	7

THE MAGIC SQUARE PUZZLE.

The puzzle is to form a magic square. That is, a different number is to be placed in every one of the nine divisions of the diagram, so that every column, every row, and each of the two diagonals shall add up to 15. This is to be done without removing to other divisions more than is necessary of the six figures already placed. What is the simplest possible solution? You need not cut this paper; simply draw the diagram on your letter.

At first sight it occurred to us that an apology would almost be needed for placing before our readers such a simple little puzzle. But experience has taught us that people are as ready to imagine difficulties where they do not exist as to overlook them when they occur. It is an interesting fact that this little poser was made by a girl of twelve. Her ten-year-old brother produced an answer in two minutes, her mother did the same in a quarter of an hour, her aunt in seven minutes, but her father declared he could not be bothered with such things—which meant he would puzzle it out on the first opportunity when he got alone.

In sending in your solution, mention how you would like the prize-money sent; we will send it on in any way that winners may prefer.

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